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Africa on a high

The talent lines up at the African Nations Cup

World Cup countdown

Djorkaeff... Ferdinand... West... We talk to the men who matter

Revealed...

The billionaire who is buying up Europe's football clubs

KAISERSLAUTERN VIOREL MOLDOVAN MUSTAPHA HADJI CONFEDERATIONS CUP

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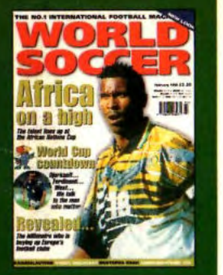
Nations Cup 98
We preview South Africa's defence of the African Nations Cup in Burkina Faso



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February 1998

Football, we are often told by people who do not know any better, is the new rock'n'roll. Ridiculous though that notion may be, Joe Lewis has taken note. This month we report on the activities of Lewis's company ENIC – owners, at the last count, of football clubs in four different European countries. ENIC readily admit that their investment in football is a speculation designed purely to deliver them a profit. The emergence of ENIC raises all sorts of questions, and we try to provide some answers in a two-part investigation which starts on page 20.

One continent which does not yet have to contend with the likes of ENIC is Africa. On page 14 we preview the 21st African Cup of Nations in Burkina Faso, a tournament which will give an important indication of the challenge the Africans will offer the world at France 98.

The World Cup will be our main focus over the next six months as we prepare for this summer's 32-nation finals. This month we are proud to present, free with WORLD SOCCER, the first of four 40-page preview booklets.

You may have noticed some changes in this month's WORLD SOCCER. These have been taken following our recent readers' survey and are designed to keep the magazine as informative and up-to-date as possible. Please let us know what you think.

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COMMENTARY

SIDELINES from Football Expo in Singapore:

● Jacques Lambert, director general of France 98, said all the fences will be coming down – even at reluctant Lens and Saint-Etienne. And he warned that FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter would get the blame for any crowd trouble "by leaving it so late to insist on removing the fences".

● Michel Platini, joint president of the organising committee, rejected criticism of the size of French stadia, saying: "We suffer by comparison with the United States but we cannot ask Toulouse to build a larger stadium when they have only 10,000 fans for a League match and the French taxpayers don't want to pay."

● General secretary Sepp Blatter said FIFA is considering three options for a worldwide post-Bosman transfer system – "because clubs which are responsible for the formation of the players should get a reward from the rich clubs which take them".

Wind of change...soccer's ruling body could have little choice but to move from Switzerland

Bowing to the law of Brussels

Swiss EU entry will force FIFA to pack its bags

DOOMSDAY is around the corner of the Millennium for FIFA and UEFA. Already under way is a process whose significance cannot be overstated; an event which threatens foundation-shattering effects on the governing authorities of world and European football.

The Bosman ruling of the recent past and the Mouscron case of the immediate future will be mere straws in the wind compared with the hurricane blowing in over the mountains and down the lakes.

It is, simply, this: Switzerland is now moving inexorably towards European Union membership.

FIFA and UEFA probably have at least a decade in which to prepare either to come to terms with a world they still pretend to ignore, or to pack their bags and abandon their modern, high-cost headquarters for some picturesque new home in Liechtenstein or a cosy little hideaway state of which noone has yet heard.

Amid all the clamour of Football Expo in Singapore, in the talk shops, the lectures, the press conferences and the cocktail parties, the subject was apparently never raised. But while issues such as sponsorship, television exploitation, stadia size and fencing will always be with us, the prospect of Switzerland bowing to the law of Brussels is potentially of far greater importance.

Major companies and finance houses in Switzerland have long been pushing successive governments closer to the EU. A referendum voted decisively against membership for fear that this would compromise Switzerland's political neutrality. But now, with the European military stand-off and the Warsaw Pact blown away, is that neutrality any longer valid? Already, other like-minded countries such as Austria and Sweden have climbed aboard the EU bus.

In a fast-changing political and financial world, the creation of a single (western) European currency is a threat to Swiss financial power. And Swiss business needs trade with the EU more than the EU needs trade with Switzerland.

At one time, Swiss politicians hoped they could negotiate all the business advantages of EU membership without having to kow-tow to the law of Brussels. Now, such a deal is out of the question. When – not if – Switzerland joins the EU, all Swiss-based institutions will have to bend to European Union law. That includes those laws which affect employees' rights, commercial competition and broadcasting freedoms.

When that day comes, FIFA and UEFA might even contemplate moving their HQs to Brussels – capital of Belgium and land of Bosman.

Now wouldn't that be the ultimate irony?

Mouscron's grounds for complaint

AFTER Bosman, it's the turn of Excelsior Mouscron to throw a Belgian spanner into the works.

Mouscron have complained to the European Commission about UEFA's refusal to let them play UEFA Cup matches across the French border in a larger, more secure stadium at Lille. The complaint has been filed by the owners of the two stadia on the grounds that UEFA rules violate provisions on the freedom to provide services within the European Union.

If the Commission upholds the protest then Europe's football borders will come crashing down. There will be no stopping Wimbledon using Dublin as a base to play in the English League – and no stopping Rangers and Celtic playing in the Premier League either.

Could UEFA – or FIFA, for that matter – provide serious objection? After all, isn't the international promotion of association football their raison d'etre?

Happier days...injury has now forced Boli to quit

Basile bows out

SO FAREWELL, Basile Boli. The centre-back who headed the Champions Cup Final winner for Marseille against Milan in Munich, in 1993, has been forced to retire. With sad irony, Boli must quit because of a head injury he suffered after colliding with his own goalkeeper, during a UEFA Cup second round tie between Monaco and Leeds United in the autumn of 1995.

Taking the ENIC route

BENFICA have bought Karel Poborsky and Sergei Kandorov, and there are more signings in the pipeline. Yet only a few months ago, the annual meeting heard the club was technically bankrupt.

So where is the money coming from?

Does the arrival as coach of Graeme Souness – bearing in mind his friendship with Rangers' owner David Murray – mean profitable contact may have been made with Joseph Lewis of ENIC fame?

Beckenbauer's sad own goal

Kaiser's 2006 co-host slip-up causes fury

GOING through some old files relating to the bid process for the 1998 World Cup finals, I stumbled upon a long-forgotten article published in *FA News* by Glen Kirton, who was then Lancaster Gate's 'foreign minister'.

In it, Kirton extolled the virtues of England's bid to host the World Cup...this year.

The article appeared in November 1991, before France and England reached their entente cordiale over sharing the spoils of 1996 and 1998 and long before Egidius Braun claims to have had his chummy little chat with Sir Bert Millichip over the little matter of 2006.

More muddying of the waters? It shows simply that England have had their hat in the World Cup ring longer than the Germans. Just as Franz Beckenbauer's joint bid suggestion acknowledges, Germany and England are competing on a level playing field out there in the big wide world.

As I observed here in the past, when it comes to choosing a World Cup venue, two countries have sentimental appeal: one is Brazil as the greatest footballing nation on earth and the other is South Africa – though the social problems with which the reborn Republic must cope are starting to tarnish the veneer a little.

What Kaiser Franz said was this: "FIFA might not be in favour. They were not very happy about having to choose Japan and South Korea for the 2002 finals. But we are both wasting money. It will split the European vote and South Africa will get the 2006 World Cup if it goes on like this."

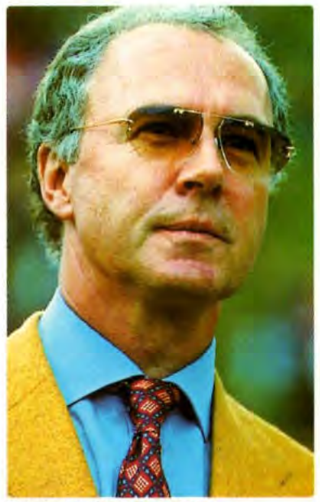
The significance of his statement was missed in much of the confused comment which followed. Beckenbauer is not merely the highest-profile German football personality, he is also the official, public face – the spearhead – of the DFB's 2006 Bid Committee.

The most spectacular own goal of his career was not uttered merely to fill a regular column in *Kicker* or *Bild*, it appeared to carry the full authority of the DFB – though German officials were clearly embarrassed and infuriated.

It is no secret that Braun and Beckenbauer fear a third candidate could snatch the 2006 World Cup because England and Germany will split the pro-European vote within the FIFA executive in two years' time. It is also no secret that UEFA has made little progress in its own ham-fisted attempt to resolve the issue 'at home'.

A nasty dilemma now faces Alec McGivan, England's bid director: should he take Beckenbauer's offer at face value and start exploratory talks over a joint bid? Or should he carry on with England's own bid and risk being labelled a bad sport – or worsen if the whole episode ends in tears?

It is accepted that the German bid faces more domestic problems than the English. Germany needs to invest heavily in stadia redevelopment and



A shade premature...Beckenbauer

faces awkward decisions over historically tainted Berlin and increasingly controversial Munich; England has a New Wembley in the pipeline.

Germany's politico-economic focus on a single European currency has meant a tightening of the financial screws, and if it comes down to a choice between money for schools and hospitals or for a World Cup bid, then that is no choice at all.

Beckenbauer himself has talked confidently in the past about a raft of sponsors providing the necessary finance. Perhaps his latest statement is an admission that German industrialists have other spending priorities.

And what of FIFA's attitude to joint-hosting?

After Japan and South Korea were forced to accept joint-hosting, Messrs Havelange, Blatter and Co insisted that this was a one-off. But that was the thin end of the wedge. By June 2000, when the decision on 2006 falls due, Lennart Johansson may well be FIFA president and UEFA, as we know vis-a-vis Euro 2000, has already happily embraced the co-hosting convention.

When Michel Platini says that a 32-team World Cup is big enough he means, really, that it's too big. Too big, certainly, for one country. FIFA, in creating a gargantuan tournament, has imposed co-hosting on itself.

Indeed, perhaps this is where the future lies. Not that one single country will host the World Cup but that the UEFA 'vision' of rotation between confederations will reach its ultimate expression – that the finals will be spread between a network of countries in each region.

Carving up the TV turkey

THAT stuff about the BBC going it alone to show all of England and Scotland's World Cup matches was just pre-negotiation posturing.

The usual happy carve-up has been agreed. BBC will show the opening ceremony followed by Scotland against Brazil on June 10 and England's match with Tunisia five days later. ITV will broadcast the Brazil match live in the company's Scottish regions then screen the two home nations' second group matches – Scotland v Norway on June 16 and England v Romania on June 22.

The potentially decisive final group matches – Scotland v Morocco on June 23 and Colombia v England three days later – will be on BBC, who will have first pick of the quarter-finals. ITV will have first choice of the second round games.

It means all 64 games from the finals will be shown on UK terrestrial television...for the last time, of course.

Future talent scout?...Hristov

Georgi best be quiet

GEORGI HRISTOV says that struggling Barnsley are badly organised and not buying enough quality players. And he's less than impressed with the local womenfolk, too.

The Macedonian told a Belgrade magazine: "I'm finding it difficult to find a girlfriend in Barnsley, or indeed settle into a decent way of life.

"The local girls are far uglier than the ones back in Belgrade or Skopje. Our women are much prettier. Besides, they don't drink as much beer as the Barnsley girls – which is something I don't like at all. England is a strange country and without team-mates Jovo Bosancic and Ales Krizan I would probably have gone home by now."

What happens next? Hristov protests that he was misquoted and that his deep-lying love of Barnsley, the people and the fans somehow got lost in translation.

Fabrizio Ravanelli said much the same – with one difference. He had the good sense not to insult the women of Middlesbrough.

Out...Vincent Guerin

Three banned

THREE French players have been banned for six months after testing positive for a prohibited steroid, nandrolone.

Vincent Guerin (PSG), Antoine Sibierski (Auxerre) and Dominique Arribage (Toulouse) also were given a year's suspended sentence.

Metreveli dies

SLAVA METREVELI, one of the great Soviet wingers, has died after a long illness, aged 61.

He won a Cup-and-League double with Moscow Torpedo in 1960, and the Soviet championship with Dynamo Tbilisi in 1964.

Metreveli scored the first goal in the first European Championship Final in 1960, when the Soviet Union beat Yugoslavia 2-1.

History man

COLIN JOSE, WORLD SOCCER's Canada correspondent, has been appointed historian for the National Soccer Hall of Fame in Oneonta, New York. His 13th book about the game, on the American Soccer League of the 20s, is due to be published this year.

Peter Neish

Surprise, surprise

Only one guess as to who has won yet another Player of the Year award...

Landslide victory...Ronaldo won the FIFA award with 480 points, 415 ahead of Roberto Carlos (inset)

THE juggernaut storms on. Ronaldo Luiz Nazario de Lima, still only 21, is the FIFA World Player of the Year for 1997, by a mere 415 points.

Brazil and Inter striker Ronaldo was voted No. 1 by 86 of the national coaches working for countries affiliated to FIFA. Another 16 put him second, and two left him struggling in third.

At five points for top spot, three for second and one for third, Ronaldo had a total of 480 compared with 65 for Roberto Carlos of Brazil and Real Madrid.

Dennis Bergkamp (Holland and Arsenal) shared third place on 62 with Zinedine Zidane of France and Juventus. Another 84 players gained at least one vote, but Ronaldo's second successive victory in the poll was very much a one-man show.

The young Brazilian was named last month as WORLD SOCCER Player of the Year, as he had been in 1996, and he also came top of the Ballon D'Or 1997 poll in *France Football* magazine. The result of that vote was just as emphatic as FIFA's. Ronaldo scored 222 points, more than three times as many as second-placed Predrag Mijatovic of Real Madrid. England coach Glenn Hoddle was out of step with the majority in the FIFA vote. He did not list Ronaldo in his top three, putting Bergkamp first, Roberto Carlos second and Paul Ince third...one of only two votes given to the Liverpool midfielder.

Leading the way...Barcelona have the upper hand over Borussia Dortmund in the European Super Cup

Barca best

BARCELONA take a comfortable but not overwhelming lead into the second leg of the European Super Cup after beating Borussia Dortmund 2-0 at Nou Camp. Only 25,000 turned up to see the Champions Cup winners beat the Cup-winners Cup-holders with goals from Luis Enrique, eight minutes into the game, and Rivaldo, who converted a penalty just after the hour.

Dial-a-player

A PHONE-IN poll open to fans will determine which club Brazilian Marcelinho Carioca will play for. Midfielder Marcelinho, recently bought by the Sao Paulo federation, will join Palmeiras, Corinthians or Sao Paulo, depending on which team gets the most votes.

Cost of failure

DISMAL failure in the World Cup qualifying competition brought an immediate response in China. The players published a letter of apology to the public, but this did not save their places. The entire national squad have been dismissed and a fresh start made.

Goran set for match

CROATIAN tennis star Goran Ivanisevic has been offered the chance to play for his beloved Hajduk Split. If he doesn't reach the semi-finals of the Dubai Open tennis tournament, he says, he will take his place on Hajduk's bench for the game against fierce rivals Croatia Zagreb on February 14. The club promise that Ivanisevic, who has been training with the team, will be called on to play at some stage.

In the army now?

REPORTS from Hungary suggest that 26-year-old Igor Nichenko, a Ukrainian striker with Ferencvaros, has been conscripted into the Ukraine army after he failed to report back to his club following a trip home. It is thought that the authorities apprehended him in Kiev as he attempted to renew his passport. Two years' military service is compulsory for all male Ukrainians under the age of 28, and the police had reportedly been trying to contact Nichenko for some time.

Team of the Month

Total votes: Van der Sar (3 votes, Ajax); G Neville (2, Man United), Blanc (2, Marseille), Hierro (5, Real Madrid), Roberto Carlos (7, Real Madrid); Moriero (3, Inter), Moller (5, Dortmund), Paulo Sousa (4, Borussia Dortmund), Balakov (4, Stuttgart); Ronaldo (3, Inter), Henry (3, Monaco).

The Votes

A Bola (Portugal): Van der Sar (Ajax); G Neville (Man United), Hierro (Real Madrid), Beto (Sporting), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Mijatovic (Real Madrid), Paulo Sousa (Borussia Dortmund), Moller (Borussia Dortmund), Balakov (Stuttgart), Ronaldo (Inter), Batistuta (Fiorentina).

Don Balon (Spain): Hesp (Barcelona); Zanetti (Inter), Leboeuf (Chelsea), Hierro (Real Madrid), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Moriero (Inter), Di Matteo (Chelsea), Moller (Borussia Dortmund), Ikpeba (Monaco); Cole (Man United), Raul (Real Madrid).

Foot (Belgium): Kopke (Marseille); Reiziger (Barcelona), Oliseh (Ajax), Leboeuf (Chelsea), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Moriero (Inter), Beckham (Man United), Zidane (Juventus), Henry (Monaco); Ronaldo (Inter), Raul (Real Madrid).

France Football: Konsel (Roma); Moriero (Inter), Worns (Bayer Leverkusen), Blanc (Marseille), Linke (Schalke); Sforza (Kaiserslautern), Paulo Sousa (Borussia Dortmund), Boffin (Metz), Giggs (Man United); Jankauskas (Club Brugge), Henry (Monaco).

Gazzetta dello Sport (Italy): Van der Sar (Ajax); West (Inter), Thuram (Parma), Hierro (Real Madrid), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Di Livio (Juventus), Moller (Borussia Dortmund), Paulo Sousa (Borussia Dortmund), Simeone (Inter); Ikpeba (Monaco), Mahlas (Vitesse Arnhem).

Sport (Switzerland): Schmeichel (Man United); G Neville (Man United), Blanc (Marseille), Hierro (Real Madrid), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Moller (Borussia Dortmund), Zidane (Juventus), F de Boer (Ajax), Balakov (Stuttgart); Ronaldo (Inter), Suker (Real Madrid).

Voetbal International (Holland): Van der Sar (Ajax); Bergomi (Inter), Guardiola (Barcelona), Hierro (Real Madrid), Lopez Rekarte (Real Sociedad); Finidi (Betis), Balakov (Stuttgart), Moller (Borussia Dortmund), McManaman (Liverpool); Eijkelkamp (Schalke), Henry (Monaco).

World Soccer (England): Hesp (Barcelona); Reuter (Borussia Dortmund), Dumas (Monaco), Blind (Ajax), Roberto Carlos (Real Madrid); Giggs (Man United), Cvitanovic (FC Croatia), Sforza (Kaiserslautern), Shevchenko (Kiev Dynamo); Jardel (Porto), Suker (Real Madrid).

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Two coaches score a record four

Carlos Alberto Parreira

Bora Milutinovic

NIGERIA and SAUDI ARABIA came down firmly on the side of experience when appointing new national coaches. The contracts handed out by Nigeria to Serb Bora Milutinovic and by the Saudis to Brazilian Carlos Alberto Parreira mean that, come the summer, each coach will have led four countries to the World Cup finals – the first men to do so.

Milutinovic, who had taken Mexico through to France 98 before being sacked, was also in charge of Mexico when they were hosts in 1986. He took Costa Rica through to the second round at Italia 90 and repeated the feat with the United States four years ago.

Parreira took Kuwait to the finals in 1982 and the UAE eight years later. Four years ago he achieved the ultimate, leading Brazil to win the World Cup.

ARGENTINA

A dispute between Fernando Redondo and national coach Daniel Passarella could mean the Real Madrid man missing France. Having refused to abide by Passarella's ruling that all players must have short hair, Redondo said: "Perhaps in five or 10 years I will regret this but there are certain things I will not compromise on."

BRAZIL

After Brazil's Confederations Cup win, coach Mario Zagallo said: "I'm very happy because I have now found out that the team will realise my dreams and win the World Cup." A week later he was more downbeat, saying finals in Europe were "always very difficult" and that he feared England, Germany, Italy, France and Spain.

BULGARIA

In a pre-Christmas friendly in Barcelona, Bulgaria were held 1-1 by a Catalonia Selection in front of 35,000.

CAMEROON

The Indomitable Lions beat Togo 3-1 in a friendly played in Cairo. Two goals from Augustine Simo and one by Joseph-Desire Job overcame a 1-0 half-time deficit.

CROATIA

Nikola Jerkan, Igor Stimac and Nikola Jurcevic were dropped from coach Miroslav Blazevic's list of the 30 players in contention for a World Cup squad place. The three new players are Mario Tokic (Rijeka), Nino Bule (Zagreb) and Jurica Vucko (Hajduk Split).

ENGLAND

National team captain Alan Shearer is due to return to first-team action with Newcastle by the end of February. He has been out with an ankle injury since pre-season.

FRANCE

Michel Platini, president of the France 98 organising committee, has named Brazil "hot favourites" to lift the trophy in July, though he said Argentina, Italy, Germany, England and France all had a reasonable chance.

GERMANY

Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer has said he is convinced his home country will reach the Final, naming the "German mentality" and Berti Vogts' leadership as two significant factors behind his confident prediction.

HOLLAND

Midfielder Aron Winter could be out of action for several weeks after fracturing a cheekbone playing for Inter.

NIGERIA

The Nigerian FA has ruled out playing warm-up friendlies with any countries supporting the sporting sanctions imposed on Nigeria in 1995 for abuse of human rights.

NORWAY

Team manager Egil Olsen decided to hold January's training session in Blackburn because 21 of the 23 selected foreign-based players are with English clubs.

SCOTLAND

Manager Craig Brown has said he is very unlikely to name Duncan Ferguson in his squad, despite calls for his reinstatement. Ferguson wrote to the FA last year announcing his retirement from international football.

SOUTH AFRICA

Frenchman Philippe Troussier has been named as new national coach, but he will not take up his post until March 1, after he has seen out his contract with Burkina Faso. Troussier has previously coached the Ivory Coast and Nigeria national sides.

SOUTH KOREA

National coach Cha Bum-kun has vowed his team would shed "sweat and blood" in a bid to reach the World Cup last 16, a feat they have failed to achieve at the last three finals. "In order to fight and win against the other strong teams we need physical stamina," said Cha.

SPAIN

A third injury in four months for Barcelona defender Josep Guardiola has cast doubts over his World Cup prospects. A torn hamstring means that he could be out until the end of January.

UNITED STATES

Goalkeeper Tony Meola was called into the national squad's January training camp, the first time he had been included in the US set-up since the last World Cup.

YUGOSLAVIA

The national team surprisingly lost 3-1 to a Basque Country Selection on Boxing Day in Bilbao, falling victim to a hat-trick from Athletic Bilbao's Julen Guerrero.

WARM-UP GAMES ARRANGED TO DATE

Argentina: Bulgaria (March 11, Mar del Plata), Brazil (April 29, Rio), Cameroon (May 14, Buenos Aires).
Austria: Hungary (March 25, Vienna), USA (April 22, Vienna), Liechtenstein (June 2).
Belgium: USA (Feb 25, Brussels), Norway (March 25), Romania (April 22, Brussels), Paraguay (May 22), France, Morocco, one other (May 27-29, Casablanca), Colombia (June 3).
Brazil: Germany (March 25, Stuttgart), Argentina (April 29, Rio).
Bulgaria: Argentina (March 11, Mar del Plata).
Cameroon: Argentina (May 14, Buenos Aires), Holland (May), Luxembourg (June 1, Luxembourg), Denmark (June 5, Copenhagen).
Chile: Nigeria, Iran (Jan 28-31, Hong Kong), New Zealand (Feb 4, Auckland), England (Feb 11, Wembley) South Korea (April 22, Seoul), Japan (April 29, Tokyo), Uruguay (May 22), USA, Scotland, Paraguay (end of May, US Cup), Tunisia (June 2, Montelimar).
Colombia: Germany (May 30, Frankfurt), Belgium (June 3).
Croatia: Czech Rep (March 25, Prague), Slovakia (May 28, Pula).
Denmark: South Korea, Egypt, Thailand (Jan 25-31, King's Cup, Thailand), Scotland (March 25, Glasgow), Norway (April 22, Copenhagen), Sweden (May 28, Malmo), South Africa (June 3, Copenhagen), Cameroon (June 5, Copenhagen).
England: Chile (Feb 11, Wembley), Saudi Arabia (May 23, Wembley).
France: Spain (Jan 28, Saint-Denis), Norway (Feb 28, Marseille), Russia (March 25, Moscow), Sweden (April 22, Stockholm), Belgium, Morocco, one other (May 27-29, Casablanca), Finland (June 5, Helsinki).
Germany: Oman (Feb 18, Muscat), Saudi Arabia (Feb 22, Riyadh), Brazil (March 25, Stuttgart), Nigeria (April 22, Cologne), Finland (May 27, Helsinki), Colombia (May 30, Frankfurt), Luxembourg (June 5, Kaiserslautern).
Holland: USA (Feb 21, Miami), Mexico (Feb 24, Miami), Paraguay (May 31).
Iran: Chile, Nigeria (Jan 28-31, Hong Kong).
Italy: Slovakia (Jan 28, Catane), Paraguay (April 22).
Jamaica: Sweden (Jan 28, Kingston).
Japan: South Korea (March 1, Yokohama), Hong Kong (March 4, Yokohama), China (March 7, Tokyo), Chile (April 29, Tokyo).
Mexico: Holland (Feb 24, Miami), Paraguay (March 18), Rep of Ireland (May 23, Dublin).
Morocco: Wales (March, Casablanca), France, Belgium, one other (May 27-29, Casablanca).
Nigeria: Chile, Iran (Jan 28-31, Hong Kong), Germany (April 22, Cologne), Yugoslavia (May, Belgrade).
Norway: France (Feb 28, Marseille), Belgium (March 25), Denmark (April 22, Copenhagen), Tunisia (May 27 or 28, Molde).
Paraguay: Rest of the Americas (Jan 22), United States (March 14), Mexico (March 18), Italy (April 22), South Korea (May 2, Seoul), Belgium (May 22), USA, Scotland, Chile (end of May, US Cup), Holland (May 31), Romania (June 3, Bucharest).
Romania: Belgium (April 22, Brussels), Northern Ireland (May 30, Bucharest), Paraguay (June 3, Bucharest).
Saudi Arabia: Germany (Feb 22, Riyadh), England (May 23, Wembley).
Scotland: Denmark (March 25, Glasgow), Finland (April 22, Helsinki), Chile, Paraguay, USA (end of May, US Cup).
South Africa: Denmark (June 3, Copenhagen).
South Korea: Denmark, Thailand, Egypt (Jan 25-31, King's Cup, Thailand), Japan (March 1, Yokohama), China (March 4, Yokohama), Hong Kong (March 7, Tokyo), Chile (April 22, Seoul), Paraguay (May 2, Seoul).
Spain: France (Jan 28, Saint-Denis), Sweden (March 26, Vigo), Northern Ireland (May 27, Santander).
Tunisia: Mali (Feb 4, Bamako), Norway (May 27 or 28, Molde), Chile (June 2, Montelimar), Wales (June 6).
United States: Sweden (Jan 24, Orlando), Holland (Feb 21, Miami), Belgium (Feb 25, Brussels), Paraguay (March 14), Austria (April 22, Vienna), Chile, Scotland, Paraguay (end of May, US Cup).
Yugoslavia: Nigeria (May, Belgrade).

THE MEN WHO MATTER

Youri Djorkaeff

France's brightest star talks to Dominique Antognoni

No problem...Youri Djorkaeff's consistent excellence has been a relief to national coach Aime Jacquet

WHEN the French national team players and their families gathered for a Christmas get-together in the Alpine ski resort of Tigres, nobody would have been a more welcome arrival for coach Aime Jacquet than Youri Djorkaeff.

While Jacquet has spent much of the past year struggling to find meaningful opposition for friendlies and tearing his hair out over the activities of many of his key players, there have been no such problems with Djorkaeff. Christian Karembeu has been kicking his heels at Sampdoria waiting for his transfer to Real Madrid to be resolved; Christophe Dugarry warmed the bench (but few Catalan hearts) in Barcelona before a move to Marseille; and goalkeeper Bernard Lama, back from a drugs ban, attempted to resurrect his career at, of all places, West Ham.

But Djorkaeff is fulfilling his enormous potential in Serie A for Inter following his move from PSG 18 months ago. He played a crucial role in Inter's passage to last season's UEFA Cup Final, and this season he has been more than useful as an attacking foil to Ronaldo as Inter stormed Serie A. Transferring his exciting form from club to country will be crucial to France's chances of winning the World Cup.

Djorkaeff is all too aware of the problems Jacquet has had to deal with. He says: "In defence and midfield everything is all right, but in the forward area Jacquet is trying out a lot of players. This has turned out to be counter-productive but what could Jacquet do? We haven't played any competitive matches since Euro 96, and it isn't easy to try out new players in the friendlies. But that's been the situation."

Djorkaeff is not unduly concerned at Jacquet's reluctance to play him with Zinedine Zidane. "There is no problem. Zizou, Jacquet and I often talk about it. Jacquet told us he wants to try out new tactics and new players, but when we start the final phase of training we will go back to having both of us playing.

"Also Zizou explained to the coach that he didn't want the World Cup to be like Euro 96, when he played almost 60 matches over the season. So by using only one of us, we get more time to rest."

Djorkaeff insists that he can last the pace at this summer's finals and will be spurred on by his success in Italy. He says: "Great teams will certainly be penalised because their players are competing in many different competitions during the season. I experienced that last summer. At the Tournoi de France, I was really worn out, especially mentally.

'I will go to France 98 with an incredible desire to play, and with a sky-high morale'

I had just ended a demanding season with Inter after we had lost the UEFA Cup Final. I was really blue.

"A year ago I had difficulty learning the language, but that's no longer the case and I now feel more relaxed. So watch out! This season we are going to win the Scudetto and perhaps something more. Winning gives you the spur, so I will go to France 98 with an incredible desire to play, and with a morale that will be sky-high."

While Djorkaeff's place as the second striker for France is assured, there is much speculation as to the identity of Jacquet's choice as first striker. "I think it will be Florian Maurice, although I have never played with him," Djorkaeff says. "The ideal striker would be Papin, but I'm afraid he could not last 90 minutes. But I would take him to the World Cup as he would surely help others and could be used as a substitute. Stephane Guivarc'h must also be considered.

"As everyone knows, we also need two midfielders, one on the left and one on the right. Benoit Cauet could easily be used. Since Benoit started playing in Italy, he has improved enormously. The same could be said of Alain Boghossian [of Sampdoria]."

Not all current French internationals have been as successful abroad as Djorkaeff, who says: "When we join the great teams we are afraid of showing our inferiority. In footballing terms, we are still a small country. I didn't have any such complexes but some team-mates had problems. They didn't trust in their own abilities, but gradually the situation is changing."

For all the debate about national team selections, Djorkaeff is yet to be convinced that the French are passionate about hosting the World Cup finals. He says: "I've heard more talk about the World Cup in Italy than France. But I think French people's interest will increase in the spring."

For the moment, though, the national team are more concerned with dealing with a dissatisfied public, who booed the players off the pitch after the friendly against Scotland. "It also happened against South Africa," says Djorkaeff. "At the friendlies people like to enjoy themselves. However, there is a lack of pressure in these matches – it's not the ideal way of preparing for a World Cup."

However, Christmas spent in the snow with his national team-mates was an important step in the right direction, even if Youri's father, former French international Jean, was not there. "For the first time I didn't spend Christmas with my parents," he says. "My father was really disappointed but he told me, 'All right, but you must give me a nice present.' However, I will give my presents only in the summer: the Scudetto and then, perhaps, the World Cup."

Taribo West

Keir Radnedge on the rise of an Inter favourite

TIFOSI in the Stadio Meazza in Milan did not quite know what to make of their new left-back when they first laid eyes on Taribo West.

Sophisticated fans brought up on the legends of classical defenders such as the economical Armando Picchi, long-striding Giacinto Facchetti and iron-tackling Giuseppe Bergomi did not recognise West as a 'typical' Inter player.

But his force of personality soon changed minds – just as he had previously won over all the scouts who had trodden a path to Auxerre to see the Nigerian man-mountain.

Now the world is at his feet: with the Italian championship there for the taking, the UEFA Cup another priority target, and then the World Cup.

Whatever fate has in store for West, one of five boys born into poverty in Port Harcourt, he has already achieved his initial ambition of becoming a football star. It was a dream which filled his mind when, as a kid, he turned up each day at the Temporary Stadium, watching matches, watching training, kicking anything he could find.

"I wasn't one of those boys who played just for fun," he says. "I always had ambition. When I was a teenager the coach recommended me to a friend who ran a Second Division team in Lagos. He came to see me play in a friendly. I remember we won 2-1. I didn't score but I was the best player on the pitch. He told me later that he went back and said to his directors: 'Taribo West may not be very big but he has the heart of a lion.' "

Since those days West has developed a physique to match. He needed to know how to protect himself because that initial seven-hour bus ride towards his dream also took him to a rented room in one of the toughest suburbs of Lagos. Ultimately the violence drove him out, the last straw for West being a gangster raid in which a friend was knifed to death in front of him.

As West says: "When you have come through something like that, then playing football in front of a big crowd isn't such a big deal."

Back home, temporarily, in Port Harcourt West made his senior breakthrough with the local Sharks, with whom he moved back from midfield into defence because of the team's injury problems. West moved on up to Enugu Rangers before transferring back to Lagos with top club Julius Berger.

He was earning what felt like the fortune of £90 a month and was tipped for a place in the national squad going to the 1992 African Nations Cup in Senegal. Nigeria won – but without him. Manager Clemens Westerhof thought West too young at 18 and, anyway, he wanted only Europe-based professionals.

That was when West knew he, too, had to move to Europe. He did so in the spring of 1993, thanks to the persistence of a Senegalese agent known as Papa Samba. West says: "He came to Lagos looking for footballers and asked the staff of his hotel who were the best players in Nigeria. They gave him my name, among others. He came looking for me while I was training with the juniors before a tournament in Mauritius.

"I was having a siesta when he knocked on my door. I thought he was one of the other players who just wanted to chat so I told him to go away. But he went on knocking. I was furious at being disturbed – until he told me what he wanted."

Big at Inter...Taribo West

Papa Samba recommended West to Auxerre, famed French footballing academy commanded by the legendary Guy Roux. He gave West his air ticket and £600 to cover initial expenses – most of which West lost when pick-pocketed while changing planes in Nairobi.

Nothing much else went right either, even after he arrived in Auxerre. West was homesick. Not speaking a word of French did not help. He recalls: "Only Bruno Martini (ex-France goalkeeper) spoke a bit of English and made any effort to involve me in things. I was too aggressive, too tough. I wanted to do too much. In Nigeria I had run all over the pitch but at Auxerre I had to learn that each player has his role, his responsibilities, his zone. I learned a lot from watching the seniors like Laurent Blanc and Frank Verlaat."

Roux did not make it easy for West. He had expected to be promoted rapidly but Roux was waiting for him to demonstrate his own strength of mind. Eventually West told Roux bluntly: "Put me in the team and I'll not only be your best player but in a year or so you can sell me and make a fortune."

In 1996 Auxerre shocked French football by winning League and Cup. At the heart of defence, and the heart of their achievement, was the giant figure of Taribo West. He was there for Nigeria, too, a few months later when they won the Olympic Games soccer tournament.

Not that this secured him a place among the financial superstars when he transferred to Inter last summer. He did not even figure in the top 10 earners at his new club. Inter coach Gigi Simoni needed a left-back who could strike terror into the heart of all those nippy right-wing raiders who proliferate in Serie A.

West took three insecure months to settle into the job and then obtain the stated approval of coach and fans. The day he knew he had arrived was November 9, when he strode on to a pass from Ronaldo to thump the 88th-minute winner away to Atalanta. That secured Inter's eighth successive away win and turned West, all of a sudden, into a cult hero.

West was so thrilled he almost squeezed the life out of coach Simoni at the final whistle.

He dedicated his goal to Nigerian team-mate Nwankwo Kanu – "because he hasn't been well and I want to encourage him to join me back in the team. Also I want to dedicate this to the fans who never gave up on me even after my nightmare game against Fiorentina [when Andrei Kanchelskis took him apart]."

The fans responded as only they can. 'Taribo eats you up!' proclaimed the banners a fortnight later when Inter drew 2-2 with Milan in the San Siro derby. He did not score but was only narrowly off target with another of those thunderbolts.

'I never got impatient sitting on the Inter bench because I have great belief in my own ability'

His massive shout of disappointment could almost be heard above the roar of the crowd. As room-mate Gianluca Pagliuca says: "He makes so much noise. He's always shouting – when he's training, when he's on the mobile phone, when he says his prayers, even when he's sleeping."

West admits that the early days, when he was in and out of the team, were hard. He says: "I came to play, not to watch. But I never got impatient because I have great belief in my own ability. I just told myself: 'Taribo, concentrate on getting back into the team and staying there.' Hopefully, that's what I've done.

"When I was dropped early on I had approaches from a couple of other clubs but it never occurred to me to leave Inter."

To prove his dedication, West has had beads of black and blue – along with the yellow which features in the away kit – threaded into his rasta dreadlocks.

As West says: "Inter is in my head."

THE MEN WHO MATTER

Viorel Moldovan

Romania have unearthed a sure-fire target man, writes Nick Bidwell

Complete article...Viorel Moldovan

THINK 'Moldovan' and you may be into international poor relations. But Coventry City's new Romanian striker, Viorel Moldovan, is anything but a makeweight.

Such is his growing reputation that clubs around Europe were scrambling to offer him a contract, and agents were something of a permanent fixture at matches involving his former club, Grasshopper Zurich.

A number of English clubs were checking his credentials both on video and in the flesh, but perennial relegation escapologists Coventry were quickest off the mark. Their bid of £3.25million succeeded, and made 25-year-old Moldovan their most expensive signing.

Not that the new multilingual, cash-rich Premiership was his only possible destination. Other outfits mad about Moldovan were to be found in the Bundesliga, Serie A and Spanish Liga, leaving him spoilt for choice and his agent in a prime negotiating position.

Those in the market were aware of the qualities which make him a complete attacker, such as his strength and athleticism, ability to penetrate on the flanks and put in good crosses, and his link-up play with midfielders.

Yet first and foremost would-be employers could not have failed to notice his core business – hitting the net. He was a decent taker of chances in Romanian football, with Gloria Bistrita and Dinamo Bucharest. In Switzerland he became a penalty-box phenomenon, topping the scoring list for the past two seasons with 19 goals for Neuchatel Xamax in 95-96 and 29 last season for Grasshopper.

Once again he is in Golden Boot territory, after hitting the target 16 times before Christmas.

Moldovan is one of the few new faces in the Romanian line-up since USA 94. His flair for goals was evident during the France 98 qualifiers, and with erstwhile favourite hit-man Florin Raducioiu seemingly a spent force, the onus will be on him to provide the end product to his side's traditionally slick counter-attacks.

"The World Cup must be the most important moment of my career," says Moldovan. "At Euro 96 I was just a substitute and had little chance to show what I could do. But now I'm a regular starter, and it's great to be fully involved in the biggest competition in football. This is an opportunity I can't afford to waste.

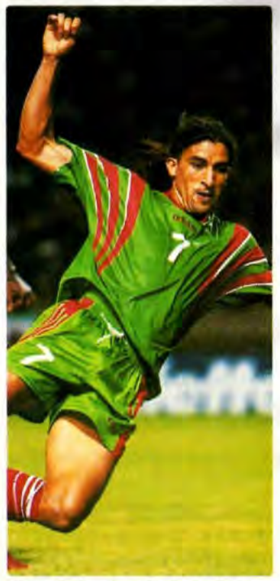
"We Romanians are not given enough credit. We were quarter-finalists in America and dropped only a couple of points in qualifying for France, but many people still seem to think of us as second-raters, a team whose golden years are over. It will be a pleasure to prove them wrong."

Moldovan is now in a perfect position to check on the opposition before Romania's date with England in Toulouse. His World Cup preparations start right here.

PRO-FILE
Club Coventry City (Eng)
Country Romania
Born August 8, 1972
Previous clubs Gloria Bistrita, Dinamo Bucharest, Neuchatel Xamax (Swi), Grasshopper Zurich (Swi)
International debut September 1993, v Israel
International caps 23 (8 goals)

Mustapha Hadji

Nick Bidwell on a creative force behind Morocco's resurgence



Midfield wizardry...Mustapha Hadji

FRANCE 98 should prove a home-from-home experience for influential Moroccan midfielder Mustapha Hadji.

Although born in Morocco 26 years ago, Hadji is of pure Gallic football stock, having been spotted as a youngster by Second Division Nancy shortly after he and his family moved to France. He gave them eight seasons of sterling service before joining Sporting Lisbon in 1996.

"I couldn't be more excited about the World Cup," says Hadji. "This is the competition every player wants to be in. To make it even more special, it's in France, where I made my name as a professional and where I have so many friends.

"Plenty of Moroccans live in France and we'll have a lot of support at our matches. But I'm not sure whether we'll benefit much.

"Naybet, Rossi, Triki and myself have played in French football and the national coach, Henri Michel, is French, too. It's an advantage, but not a big one."

In the autumn of 1993 Hadji was forced to choose between an international future with Morocco or France. He eventually plumped for the former, making his debut against Zambia before figuring in the 1994 World Cup. He made little impact in the US, however, as the team staggered out after three straight defeats in the first round.

Four years on, Morocco look infinitely stronger. Over the past two years, Henri Michel has presided over major surgery, introducing fresh faces such as Salaheddine Bassir, Abdelilah Saber, Youssef Rossi and Youssef Chippo, and giving new responsibilities to the supremely talented Hadji.

He began his career as an out-and-out attacker, and ought to score more goals. He managed only one on the road to France 98, in a 2-2 draw in Ghana.

Yet in every other respect he is the ideal creative midfielder, a fast-maturing strategist with an abundance of technical wizardry.

"It's great to play for such a strong Moroccan side," he says. "Although we've had tough draws for the finals of the World Cup (Brazil, Scotland, Norway) and African Nations Cup (Egypt, Zambia, Mozambique), we could soon have journalists talking as much about Morocco as they do about Nigeria."

In contrast, the outlook for Hadji on the club front is not so bright. He swapped one underachieving side for another when he joined his national team-mate Naybet at Deportivo La Coruna during the Spanish transfer window in December after disappointment with Sporting Lisbon.

Sporting can compete with the best on their day, notably hammering Monaco in their opening Champions League tie – a false dawn in which Hadji scored with a rare header – but failed to reach the quarter-finals.

Hadji can only hope that the same sort of under-achievement does not strike his new side – or Morocco – in the next few months.

PRO-FILE
Club Deportivo La Coruna (Spa)
Country Morocco
Born November 16, 1971, in Ifrane
Previous club AS Nancy-Lorraine
International debut October 1993, v Zambia
International caps 26 (4 goals)

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Last time around…South Africa win the African Nations Cup on home soil in 1996; the defence of their title in Burkina Faso could prove to be tough

Wide Open

Keeping the title may be too much for the holders South Africa. Mark Gleeson previews the African Nations Cup

THE African Nations Cup finals in Burkina Faso have possibly the most open field in the competition's 31-year history. Four of Africa's five World Cup representatives are on hand for vital preparation and a presentation of their credentials ahead of the footballing fiesta in France later in the year.

Only Nigeria, who are suspended after refusing to take part in the finals in South Africa two years ago, will be missing from this assembly of the African soccer elite.

Their absence is a big blow to the credibility of the tournament but they are unlikely to be missed in three weeks of intense competition.

The Nations Cup joins the CONCACAF Gold Cup, being hosted at almost the same time in California, as the only two continental championships placed so close to the World Cup kick-off, and presents a searching test of Cameroon, Morocco, South Africa and Tunisia.

South Africa are the defending champions but not considered among the favourites as a result of the instability and uncertainty that followed the departure of their coach, Clive Barker. His successor is Philippe Troussier, but he only takes over after the Nations Cup finals, because he has a commitment to coach Burkina Faso. As a result, South Africa have appointed Jomo Sono to coach the team on a temporary basis.

When the draw for the finals of the 21st edition of the Nations Cup was made in Ouagadougou last September there were plenty of smiles from the South African camp. Angola, Ivory Coast and Namibia in Group C were seen as easy pickings for a team still savouring the glory of reaching the World Cup finals.

But just as Bafana Bafana's form has dipped, so the signals from the opposing camps are getting stronger. Angola are continuing a quick-fire rise up the African footballing ladder and the Ivorians are undergoing a renaissance after some time in the doldrums. Namibia, too, are happy at the possibility of picking off the carcass of their much-vaunted southern neighbours.

'The Cup presents a searching test of Cameroon, Morocco, South Africa and Tunisia'

The pampered South African national team will find the going tough off the field, too. In the desert wilderness of Bobo Dioulasso, Bafana Bafana are expected to find the conditions difficult, perhaps even hostile.

This opens the door, therefore, for the likes of Morocco and Tunisia to convert their recent domination of African soccer at club level into success at national team level.

Morocco are the form team in Africa, with the highest FIFA ranking and having had polished and efficient qualifying campaigns for both the Nations Cup and World Cup.

French coach Henri Michel has done much to transform a team who failed to reach the finals of the last two editions of the Nations Cup finals, in Tunisia and South Africa.

They will have a tough test of their pedigree early on, having been drawn in Group D with Egypt, Mozambique and Zambia, the so-called 'group of death'.

Zambia, with new German coach Burkhard Ziese, are the top seeds in the group, by virtue of having finished third last time round, but could find themselves edged out by Egypt.

Cameroon and Tunisia have relatively easy paths to the knockout stage.

Cameroon are in Group A with hosts Burkina Faso, Algeria and Guinea; Tunisia are in Group B with Ghana, Togo and the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly Zaire.

Ghana could be a strong outside bet for the championship. They will have Abedi Pele at the helm, for possibly the last time, and after the disappointment of missing France they might well find the motivation to stretch their record number of wins to five.

THE DRAW

Group A

Feb 7: Burkina Faso-Cameroon (Ouagadougou, 4th August stadium)
Feb 8: Algeria-Guinea (Ouagadougou, Municipal stadium)
Feb 11: Cameroon-Guinea (Ouaga, Municipal)
Feb 11: Burkina Faso-Algeria (Ouaga, 4th August)
Feb 15: Burkina Faso-Guinea (Ouaga, Municipal)
Feb 15: Cameroon-Algeria (Ouaga, 4th August)

Group B

Feb 9: Togo-Congo DR (Bobo Dioulasso)
Feb 9: Ghana-Tunisia (Ouaga, 4th August)
Feb 12: Tunisia-Congo DR (Ouaga, Municipal)
Feb 12: Ghana-Togo (Ouaga, 4th August)
Feb 16: Ghana-Congo DR (Ouaga, 4th August)
Feb 16: Tunisia-Togo (Ouaga, Municipal)

Group C

Feb 8: South Africa-Angola (Bobo Dioulasso)
Feb 8: Ivory Coast-Namibia (Bobo Dioulasso)
Feb 11: South Africa-Ivory Coast (Bobo Dioulasso)
Feb 12: Angola-Namibia (Bobo Dioulasso)
Feb 16: Angola-Ivory Coast (Ouaga, Municipal)
Feb 16: South Africa-Namibia (Bobo Dioulasso)

Group D

Feb 9: Zambia-Morocco (Bobo Dioulasso)
Feb 10: Egypt-Mozambique (Bobo Dioulasso)
Feb 13: Zambia-Egypt (Bobo Dioulasso)
Feb 13: Morocco-Mozambique (Bobo Dioulasso)
Feb 17: Morocco-Egypt (Ouaga, Municipal)
Feb 17: Zambia-Mozambique (Bobo Dioulasso)

Quarter-finals

1..**Feb 20:** Winner A-Runner-up B (Bobo Dioulasso)
2..**Feb 21:** Winner B-Runner-up A (Ouaga, 4th Aug)
3..**Feb 21:** Winner C-Runner-up D (Ouaga, Municipal)
4..**Feb 22:** Winner D-Runner-up C (Ouaga, Municipal)

Semi-finals

Feb 25: Winner 1-Winner 4 (Ouaga, 4th August)
Feb 25: Winner 2-Winner 3 (Bobo Dioulasso)

3rd Place play-off

Feb 27: at Ouagadougou, Municipal

Final

Feb 28: at Ouagadougou, 4th August

FOR THE RECORD

The results of the 16 African Nations Cup qualifiers during 1997

ALGERIA

04-01 Algeria 0 Tunisia 0 (F)
12-01 Lebanon 2 Algeria 2 (F)
26-01 Mali 1 Algeria 0 (CAN)
23-02 Benin 1 Algeria 1 (CAN)
31-05 Tunisia 0 Algeria 1 (F)
05-06 Senegal 0 Algeria 0 (F)
22-06 Ivory Coast 2 Algeria 1 (CAN)
11-07 Algeria 1 Mali 0 (CAN)
27-07 Algeria 2 Benin 0 (CAN)
28-09 Algeria 0 Kenya 1 (F)
30-09 Algeria 0 Zambia 1 (F)
04-10 Tanzania 0 Algeria 1 (F)
20-12 Egypt 1 Algeria 2 (F)

ANGOLA

12-01 Cameroon 0 Angola 0 (WC)
23-02 Zimbabwe 1 Angola 0 (CAN)
31-03 Mozambique 1 Angola 2 (F)
06-04 Angola 3 Togo 1 (WC)
27-04 Zimbabwe 0 Angola 0 (WC)
08-06 Angola 1 Cameroon 1 (WC)
22-06 Angola 1 Ghana 0 (CAN)
27-07 Angola 2 Zimbabwe 1 (CAN)
17-08 Togo 1 Angola 1 (WC)

BURKINA FASO

12-01 Burkina Faso 0 Guinea 2 (WC)
29-03 Tanzania 3 Burkina Faso 2 (F)
06-04 Kenya 4 Burkina Faso 3 (WC)
27-04 Burkina Faso 1 Nigeria 2 (WC)
31-05 Burkina Faso 2 Mali 0 (F)
04-06 Togo 0 Burkina Faso 0 (F)
08-06 Guinea 3 Burkina Faso 1 (WC)
16-08 Burkina Faso 2 Kenya 4 (WC)
03-11 Ivory Coast 0 Burkina Faso (F)
12-12 Zambia 2 Burkina Faso 0 (F)
28-12 Burkina Faso 2 Ivory Coast 0 (F)

CAMEROON

12-01 Cameroon 0 Angola 0 (WC)
26-01 Cameroon 4 Namibia 0 (CAN)
22-02 Kenya 0 Cameroon 0 (CAN)
09-03 Costa Rica 5 Cameroon 0 (F)
06-04 Cameroon 1 Zimbabwe 0 (WC)
20-04 Cameroon 2 Congo 0 (F)
27-04 Cameroon 2 Togo 0 (WC)
01-06 Zambia 3 Cameroon 0 (F)
08-06 Angola 1 Cameroon 1 (WC)
22-06 Cameroon 2 Gabon 2 (CAN)
12-07 Namibia 0 Cameroon 1 (CAN)
27-07 Cameroon 1 Kenya 1 (CAN)
07-08 Cameroon 0 Nigeria 1 (F)
09-08 Cameroon 3 Zambia 3 (F)
17-08 Zimbabwe 1 Cameroon 2 (WC)
22-10 Cameroon 1 Cuba 1 (F)
15-11 England 2 Cameroon 0 (F)
24-12 Cameroon 3 Togo 1 (F)

CONGO DR (formerly ZAIRE)

12-01 Zaire 1 Congo 1 (WC)
25-01 Tanzania 1 Zaire 2 (CAN)
23-02 Togo 1 Zaire 1 (CAN)
09-04 Zaire 2 Zambia 2 (WC)
27-04 Zaire 1 South Africa 2 (WC)
08-06 Congo 1 Congo DR 0 (WC)
22-06 Liberia 2 Congo DR 1 (CAN)
28-06 Congo DR 0 Uganda 0 (F)
13-07 Congo DR 1 Tanzania 1 (CAN)
27-07 Congo DR 1 Togo 0 (CAN)
17-08 Zambia 2 Congo DR 0 (WC)

EGYPT

05-01 Egypt 2 Belarus 0 (F)
12-01 Tunisia 1 Egypt 0 (WC)
25-01 Senegal 0 Egypt 0 (CAN)
18-02 Kuwait 2 Egypt 0 (F)
23-02 Ethiopia 1 Egypt 1 (CAN)
06-04 Liberia 1 Egypt 0 (WC)
26-04 Namibia 2 Egypt 3 (WC)
08-06 Egypt 0 Tunisia 0 (WC)
12-06 South Korea 3 Egypt 1 (F)
14-06 Egypt 0 Yugoslavia 0 (F)
16-06 Egypt 2 Ghana 0 (F)
21-06 Morocco 1 Egypt 0 (CAN)
13-07 Egypt 2 Senegal 0 (CAN)
27-07 Egypt 8 Ethiopia 1 (CAN)
17-08 Egypt 5 Liberia 0 (WC)
17-12 Egypt 7 Togo 2 (F)
20-12 Egypt 1 Algeria 2 (F)

GHANA

05-01 Togo 4 Ghana 0 (F)
12-01 Ghana 2 Morocco 2 (WC)
26-01 Zimbabwe 0 Ghana 0 (CAN)
05-04 Sierra Leone 1 Ghana 1 (WC)
27-04 Ghana 3 Gabon 0 (WC)
07-06 Morocco 1 Ghana 0 (WC)
12-06 Ghana 1 Yugoslavia 3 (F)
14-06 South Korea 3 Ghana 0 (F)
16-06 Egypt 2 Ghana 0 (F)
22-06 Angola 1 Ghana 0 (CAN)
12-07 Ghana 2 Zimbabwe 1 (CAN)
16-08 Ghana 0 Sierra Leone 2 (WC)

GUINEA

08-01 Ivory Coast 2 Guinea 1 (F)
12-01 Burkina Faso 0 Guinea 2 (WC)
26-01 Guinea 1 Tunisia 0 (CAN)
23-02 Guinea 1 Sierra Leone 0 (CAN)
05-04 Nigeria 2 Guinea 1 (WC)
27-04 Kenya 1 Guinea 0 (WC)
08-06 Guinea 3 Burkina Faso 1 (WC)
12-07 Tunisia 1 Guinea 0 (CAN)
17-08 Guinea 1 Nigeria 0 (WC)
29-11 Guinea 0 Mali 0 (ACC)
01-12 Guinea 3 Sierra Leone 0 (ACC)
03-12 Guinea 2 Guinea Bissau 0 (ACC)
05-12 Guinea 1 Senegal 2 (ACC)
07-12 Gambia 2 Guinea 2 (ACC)

IVORY COAST

08-01 Ivory Coast 2 Guinea 1 (F)
26-01 Ivory Coast 1 Benin 0 (CAN)
23-02 Mali 1 Ivory Coast 2 (CAN)
08-05 Ivory Coast 4 Senegal 1 (F)
22-06 Ivory Coast 2 Algeria 1 (CAN)
13-07 Benin 0 Ivory Coast 0 (CAN)
27-07 Ivory Coast 4 Mali 2 (CAN)
03-11 Ivory Coast 0 Burkina Faso 0 (F)
28-12 Burkina Faso 2 Ivory Coast 0 (F)

MOROCCO

12-01 Ghana 2 Morocco 2 (WC)
22-02 Senegal 0 Morocco 0 (CAN)
26-04 Sierra Leone 0 Morocco 1 (WC)
01-06 Morocco 4 Ethiopia 0 (CAN)
07-06 Morocco 1 Ghana 0 (WC)
21-06 Morocco 1 Egypt 0 (CAN)
12-07 Ethiopia 0 Morocco 1 (CAN)
27-07 Morocco 3 Ethiopia 0 (CAN)
16-08 Morocco 2 Gabon 0 (WC)
09-10 Brazil 2 Morocco 0 (F)
26-11 Morocco 3 Togo 0 (F)

MOZAMBIQUE

19-01 Mozambique 1 Zimbabwe 2 (F)
26-01 Mozambique 3 Mauritius 0 (CAN)
22-02 Malawi 2 Mozambique 0 (CAN)
02-03 Swaziland 0 Mozambique 4 (CCC)
31-03 Mozambique 1 Angola 2 (F)
12-04 Malawi 2 Mozambique 2 (CCC)
15-06 Mozambique 3 Tanzania 0 (CCC)
22-06 Mozambique 2 Zambia 2 (CAN)
13-07 Mauritius 1 Mozambique 3 (CAN)
26-07 Mozambique 2 Malawi 1 (CAN)
02-08 Zambia 2 Mozambique 1 (CCC)
12-12 Swaziland 1 Mozambique 1 (F)

NAMIBIA

11-01 Namibia 0 Liberia 0 (WC)
26-01 Cameroon 4 Namibia 0 (CAN)
22-02 Namibia 1 Gabon 1 (CAN)
16-03 Namibia 2 Zimbabwe 1 (CCC)
06-04 Namibia 1 Tunisia 2 (WC)
27-04 Namibia 2 Egypt 3 (WC)
31-05 Tanzania 0 Namibia 0 (CCC)
08-06 Liberia 1 Namibia 2 (WC)
21-06 Kenya 0 Namibia 1 (CAN)
28-06 Namibia 4 Malawi 1 (CCC)
12-07 Namibia 0 Cameroon 1 (CAN)
27-07 Gabon 1 Namibia 1 (CAN)
17-08 Tunisia 4 Namibia 0 (WC)
30-08 Namibia 1 Zambia 1 (CCC)
01-11 Lesotho 2 Namibia 1 (F)

SOUTH AFRICA

11-01 Zambia 0 South Africa 0 (WC)
06-04 Congo 2 South Africa 0 (WC)
27-04 Zaire 1 South Africa 2 (WC)
24-05 England 2 South Africa 1 (F)
04-06 South Africa 0 Holland 2 (F)
08-06 South Africa 3 Zambia 0 (WC)
16-08 South Africa 1 Congo 0 (WC)
11-10 France 2 South Africa 1 (F)
15-11 Germany 3 South Africa 0 (F)
07-12 South Africa 1 Brazil 2 (F)
13-12 Czech Rep 2 South Africa 2 (CC)
15-12 South Africa 0 UAE 1 (CC)
17-12 South Africa 3 Uruguay 4 (CC)

TOGO

05-01 Togo 4 Ghana 0 (F)
12-01 Zimbabwe 3 Togo 0 (WC)
19-01 Benin 1 Togo 1 (F)
25-01 Liberia 1 Togo 2 (CAN)
23-02 Togo 1 Zaire 1 (CAN)
30-03 Gabon 2 Togo 1 (F)
06-04 Angola 3 Togo 1 (WC)
27-04 Cameroon 2 Togo 0 (WC)
04-06 Togo 0 Burkina Faso 0 (F)
08-06 Togo 2 Zimbabwe 1 (WC)
21-06 Tanzania 1 Togo 0 (CAN)
13-07 Togo 4 Liberia 0 (CAN)
27-07 Congo DR 1 Togo 0 (CAN)
17-08 Togo 1 Angola 1 (WC)
30-10 United Arab Emirates 3 Togo 0 (F)
26-11 Morocco 3 Togo 0 (F)
18-12 Egypt 7 Togo 2 (F)
24-12 Cameroon 3 Togo 1 (F)

TUNISIA

04-01 Algeria 0 Tunisia 0 (F)
12-01 Tunisia 1 Egypt 0 (WC)
26-01 Guinea 1 Tunisia 0 (CAN)
06-04 Namibia 1 Tunisia 2 (WC)
27-04 Tunisia 2 Liberia 0 (WC)
31-05 Tunisia 0 Algeria 1 (F)
08-06 Egypt 0 Tunisia 0 (WC)
05-07 Tunisia 1 Mali 0 (F)
12-07 Tunisia 1 Guinea 0 (CAN)
07-08 Tunisia 2 Zambia 0 (F)
09-08 Tunisia 2 Nigeria 0 (F)
17-08 Tunisia 4 Namibia 0 (WC)
01-10 Tunisia 0 Australia 3 (F)
05-11 Tunisia 2 Bosnia 1 (F)

ZAMBIA

11-01 Zambia 0 South Africa 0 (WC)
25-01 Malawi 0 Zambia 2 (CAN)
23-02 Mauritius 0 Zambia 0 (CAN)
02-03 Lesotho 0 Zambia 2 (CCC)
09-04 Zaire 2 Zambia 2 (WC)
20-04 Zambia 4 Malawi 0 (CCC)
27-04 Zambia 3 Congo 0 (WC)
27-05 Kuwait 2 Zambia 1 (F)
01-06 Zambia 3 Cameroon 0 (F)
08-06 South Africa 3 Zambia 0 (WC)
22-06 Mozambique 2 Zambia 2 (CAN)
05-07 Tanzania 2 Zambia 2 (CCC)
12-07 Zambia 3 Malawi 1 (CAN)
26-07 Zambia 1 Mauritius 0 (CAN)
02-08 Zambia 2 Mozambique 1 (CCC)
07-08 Tunisia 2 Zambia 0 (F)
09-08 Cameroon 3 Zambia 3 (F)
17-08 Zambia 2 Congo DR 0 (WC)
30-08 Namibia 1 Zambia 1 (CCC)
30-09 Algeria 0 Zambia 1 (F)
12-12 Zambia 2 Burkina Faso 0 (F)
17-12 Zambia 0 Nigeria 0 (F)

Key: ACC – Amilcar Cabral Cup; CAN – African Nations Cup 98 qualifier; CC – Confederations Cup; CCC – Cosafa Castle Cup: F – Friendly international; WC – World Cup 98 qualifier.

GROUP A NATIONS CUP 98 – BURKINA FASO

ALGERIA

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

AOMAR HAMENED
Goalkeeper. JS Kabylie. 28.
REZKI AMROUCHE
Defender. JS Kabylie. 27.
SID AHMED ZERROUKI
Defender. Mouloudia Oran. 27.
ABDELOUAHAB TIZAROUNE
Defender. USM Alger. 26.
FAYCAL HAMDANI
Defender. USM Alger. 27.
BILLEL DZIRI
Midfielder. USM Alger. 25.
MOUSSA SAIB
Midfielder. Valencia (Spa). 28.
TARIK GHOUL
Midfielder. USM Alger. 22.
CHEIKH BENZERGA
Midfielder. Mouloudia Oran. 25.
KHALED LOUNICI
Striker. USM El Harrach. 30.
ABDELHAFID TASFAOUT
Striker. Guingamp (Fra). 28.

Moussa Saib

ALGERIA were winners of the African Nations Cup when hosts in 1990 – the only time they have won the tournament.

Civil unrest in Algeria in recent years has played havoc with the footballing structures, with several leading federation officials assassinated. There has also been turmoil between the federation and leading clubs, delaying the start of the latest League season.

Algeria, with only two established Europe-based professionals, have had to scramble to put together some preparatory games before they get to Burkina Faso. Results have been good, with away wins over Egypt and Tanzania.

Their key player will be captain Moussa Saib, the only survivor of the 1990 Nations Cup-winning team. In the summer he moved from Auxerre to Valencia. Saib is the playmaker and he will have to be on form for Algeria to have any chance of taking the title.

The coach is Abderrahman Mehdaoui, appointed after Algeria's surprise elimination from the preliminary round of the World Cup qualifiers. He is responsible for putting the team back on track and into the Nations Cup finals with wins in their last two key qualifiers.

BURKINA FASO

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

IBRAHIMA DIARRA
Goalkeeper. FUS Rabat (Mor). 30.
CAMILLE PALENFO
Defender. ASFA Yennenga. 21.
HASSANE KAMAGATE
Defender. ASFA Yennenga. 27.
PIERRE KOUADA
Defender. ASFA Yennenga. 31.
VINCENT LOMBAKI YE
Midfielder. Sete (Fra). 31.
MAMADOU KONE
Midfielder. USFA. 23.
OUSMANE SANOU
Midfielder. Willem II Tilburg (Hol). 19.
BRAHIMA TRAORE
Midfielder. FC Bressuire (Fra). 23.
SEYDOU TRAORE
Midfielder. FC Bressuire (Fra). 27.
MAMADOU ZONGO
Striker. ASEC Abidjan (Ivo). 17.
ALASSANE OUEDRAOGO
Striker. Charleroi (Bel). 17.

THE Burkinabe are battered and bruised going into their hosting of the Nations Cup. The *Etalons* (Stallions) were the only team in the African group qualifiers for this year's World Cup finals to lose every match.

Bulgarian-born coach Ivan Voutov lost his job, and the international careers of several experienced players were ended.

But Burkina Faso are hoping Frenchman Philippe Troussier will be able to put together a team that will give a credible performance in front of their home fans. He is known as the 'white witchdoctor' in west Africa, a name earned for some spectacular come-from-behind victories while in charge at Ivorian giants ASEC Abidjan.

He was fired as the Ivorian national team coach, shown the door before he could complete a season at Kaizer Chiefs in South Africa, worked in the Moroccan Second Division and was then dumped by Nigeria after helping them to secure a place in the World Cup finals. But the Frenchman still has a big reputation in Africa and will take over the running of the South African national team after his contract with Burkina Faso ends following the Nations Cup.

This is only the third time that the Burkinabe will be competing. Their first and second appearances were barely credible, with the team being possibly the worst side at the last tournament in South Africa in 1996. They were hammered by Algeria and Zambia, and coach Idrissa Traore was sacked while the tournament was still in progress.

Much hope will rest on teenager Mamadou Zongo, who already has a reputation that stretches way beyond his country's borders. He plays for the Ivory Coast's ASEC Abidjan, and is the new wonderboy of west African football, twice Burkina's Footballer of the Year and the leading goalscorer in the League with RC Bobo-Dioulasso before moving south to Abidjan. With ASEC he finished as the club's top scorer as they won the double.

CAMEROON

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

JACQUES SONGO'O
Goalkeeper. Deportivo La Coruna (Spa). 33.
PIERRE NLEND WOME
Defender. Lucchese (Ita). 18.
RIGOBERT SONG
Defender. Metz (Fra). 21.
RAYMOND KALLA
Defender. Panahaiki (Gre). 22.
ROMARIN BILLONG
Defender. St Etienne (Fra). 27.
BERNARD TCHOUTANG
Midfielder. No club. 21.
MARC-VIVIEN FOE
Midfielder. Lens (Fra). 22.
MARIE JOSE TCHANGO
Midfielder. Tecos (Mex). 19.
JEAN-JACQUES ETAME
Midfielder. Bastia (Fra). 31
PATRICK MBOMA
Striker. Gamba Osaka (Jap). 27.
ALPHONSE TCHAMI
Striker. Hertha Berlin (Ger). 26.

Patrick Mboma

CAMEROON will be concentrating on getting some decent preparation for the World Cup as coach Jean Manga Onguene tries to juggle his fast-expanding squad.

The Nations Cup will give him further opportunity to look at the talents of Joseph-Desire Job, Samuel Ipoua and Jean-Jacques Etame, who have committed their future to Cameroon rather than France, where they were born.

Given the relative ease of their opening group, this tournament might well give a great boost to both Cameroonian morale and profile, since recent tournaments have marked a distinct decline in the team's standings.

Experience comes in the form of Jacques Songo'o, the Spain-based goalkeeper, and Hertha Berlin striker Alphonse Tchami. Genuine talent has been evident in the form of striker Patrick Mboma and full-back Pierre Nlend Wome, who could emerge as a big name.

Mboma was top scorer for Cameroon in the World Cup qualifiers, while Wome broke the record at the last Nations Cup for being the youngest-ever competitor.

If Cameroon make an impression in this tournament, it could put them in buoyant mood for June.

GUINEA

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

SALIOU DIALLO
Goalkeeper. Hafia. 25.
MOHAMED CAMARA
Defender. Le Havre (Fra). 22.
ALSENY KEITA
Defender. Eendracht Aalst (Bel). 20.
MAURICE CAMARA
Defender. ASFAG. 20.
SOULEYMANE OULARE
Midfielder. Genk (Bel). 25.
PABLO THIAM
Midfielder. Koln (Ger). 23.
SEKOU OUMAR DRAME
Midfielder. Lech Poznan (Pol). 24.
FODE CAMARA
Midfielder. Kortrijk (Bel). 25.
MOMO WANDEL SOUMAH
Striker. Club Africain (Tun). 21.
ABOUBACAR TITI CAMARA
Striker. Marseille (Fra). 25.
OUSMANE NGOM CAMARA
Striker. Excelsior Mouscron (Bel). 22.

GUINEA were once among the dominant forces in African football, winning four club titles and finishing runners-up in 1976 at the Nations Cup finals. But those glory days quickly faded and it has been a long and frustrating fight back to prominence.

Guinea have been to only one other Nations Cup finals tournament in the past 18 years but a new generation of talent gives hopes for more success and consistency in the future. Players such as Aboubacar Titi Camara at Marseille, Morlay Soumah at Bastia and Belgium-based Souleymane Oulare have put Guinea back among the continent's elite.

They had the good fortune of participating in a qualifying group where two countries – the Central African Republic and Sierra Leone – withdrew before the campaign had ended. But in all fairness, the Guineans would have probably qualified anyway, such has been their rehabilitation.

Titi Camara will be the kingpin for the team, even if he has been struggling to find form at Marseille this season after his move from Lens. He was in the squad at the country's last appearance in the Nations Cup in 1994, when they lost both opening round games and were early departees.

GROUP B NATIONS CUP 98 – BURKINA FASO

CONGO DR

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

NIKOMBE TOKALA
Goalkeeper. Vita Club. 27.
MICHEL DINZEY
Defender. Hertha Berlin (Ger). 25.
NZELO LEMBI
Defender. FC Brugge (Bel). 22.
EPANGALA LOKOSE
Defender. Cape Town Spurs (SAf). 27.
ROGER HITOTO
Defender. Lille (Fra). 27.
NZANGANI KIDODA
Midfielder. Manning Rangers (SAf). 20.
ETIENNE NSUNDA
Midfielder. Chaves (Por). 23.
EKANZA SIMBA
Midfielder. Beveren (Bel). 28.
NGOY NSUMBU
Striker. Genk (Bel). 25.
ELONGIA EKAKIA
Striker. Lokeren (Bel). 23.
ROGER LUKAKU
Striker. Mechelen (Bel). 30.

Ekanza Simba

THE former Zaire will be a bit of an unknown entity when they go to Burkina Faso. The civil war last year brought much change to the footballing structures in the giant central African country. For a start, they have new colours (blue and white) and are no longer known as the Leopards.

There is also a new coaching staff, with former national team star Pierre Kalala returning to the helm. He was in charge of the side at two previous Nations Cup finals (1992 and 1994) and is known for his no-nonsense approach.

The Congolese will need it, for they are a temperamental bunch, endowed with lots of ability and potential but lacking in the discipline department. They have some menacing strikers and a crafty midfield, where the speed of Etienne Nsunda and the guile of Ekanza Simba could turn the team into the surprise of the tournament.

Zaire won the Nations Cup in 1968 and 1974, since when they have never been past the quarter-final stage. Congo DR could go further this time, though they will not be fancied against Ghana or Tunisia in the opening round. Even so, few teams will treat them lightly.

GHANA

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

RICHARD KINGSTON
Goalkeeper. Galatasaray (Tur). 22.
FRANK AMANKWAH
Defender. AZ '67 Alkmaar (Hol). 26.
ERIC ADDO
Defender. FC Brugge (Bel). 19.
MOHAMMED GARGO
Defender. Udinese (Ita). 22.
SAMUEL OSEI KUFFOUR
Defender. Bayern Munich (Ger). 21.
ALEX NYARKO
Midfielder. Karlsruhe (Ger). 24.
SAM JOHNSON
Midfielder. Anderlecht (Bel). 24.
ABEDI PELE AYEW
Midfielder. 1860 Munich (Ger). 33.
PETER OFORI-QUAYE
Striker. Olympiakos (Gre). 18.
KWAME AYEW
Striker. Boavista (Por). 24.
TONY YEBOAH
Striker. Hamburg (Ger). 34.

Abedi Pele

GHANA have the best Nations Cup record of any country, though it is 16 years since they last won it.

That was in Libya in 1982, when Abedi Pele was a 17-year-old substitute in the Final and Ghana won a record fourth title to add to victories in 1963, 1965 and 1978. The team have also been runners-up on three occasions, the last time in Senegal in 1992.

They were quarter-finalists in Tunisia in 1994 and fourth in South Africa in 1996. Disappointment at again missing out on World Cup qualification will spur on the Black Stars, who are southerly neighbours of Burkina Faso and will have huge travelling support.

Pele remains the inspiration for the Black Stars but will probably be playing his last Nations Cup as he is now 33. He is going to his fifth Nations Cup, one short of the record held by Cameroon's Emmanuel Kunde, Musa Lawal of Nigeria, Algeria's Rabah Madjer and Abdoulaye Traore, the Ivorian striker.

Pele's honours could take years for another African player to match. Three African Footballer of the Year awards have been complemented by success in the European Cup with Marseille.

TOGO

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

WAKE NIDOMBE
Goalkeeper. Goldfields (Gha). 28.
YAOUI ABALO
Defender. Amiens (Fra). 22.
ATTY AFFO
Defender. Charleroi (Bel). 30.
MESSAN AMETOKODO
Defender. Agaza Lome. 26.
KOMLAN ASSIGNON
Defender. Cannes (Fra). 23.
LANTAME OUADJA
Midfielder. Servette (Swi). 20.
TADJOU SALOU
Midfielder. Servette (Swi). 24.
KODJO BALAOGOU
Midfielder. Reims (Fra). 21.
KOSSI NOUTSOUDJE
Midfielder. Goldfields (Gha). 20.
DJIMA OYAWOLE
Striker. Lorient (Fra). 21.
BACHIROU SALOU
Striker. MSV Duisburg (Ger). 27.

TOGO are one of the surprise qualifiers, making only their third appearance at a Nations Cup finals and their first in 18 years. The strength and goals of Germany-based striker Bachirou Salou proved the inspiration for the tiny west African country, who had to come through the preliminary rounds.

Togo's catalyst was a 2-1 away win over George Weah and his Liberian compatriots right at the start of their campaign. It set them on an unpredictable trail of success and in the end they were comfortable winners of their group.

Whether that momentum will continue remains to be seen. In December they got a 7-2 hiding from Egypt in a warm-up friendly and also lost to Cameroon. They will be considered the whipping boys of the group but if Salou is in menacing form, there could be a surprise or two in the offing.

TUNISIA

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

BOUBAKER ZITOUNI
Goalkeeper. Club Africain. 32.
SAMI TRABELSI
Defender. CS Sfaxien. 29.
KHALED BADRA
Defender. Esperance. 24.
MOHAMED MKACHER
Defender. Etoile Sahel.
TAREK THABET
Defender. Esperance. 26.
RIADH BOUAZIZI
Midfielder. Etoile Sahel. 24.
ZOUBIER BEYA
Midfielder. Freiburg (Ger). 26.
SKANDER SOUAYEH
Midfielder. CS Sfaxien. 25.
SIRAJEDDINE CHIHI
Midfielder. Esperance. 27.
ADEL SELLIMI
Striker. Bastia (Fra). 25.
MEHDI BEN SLIMANE
Striker. Freiburg (Ger). 23.

Zoubier Beya

TUNISIA were surprise runners-up at the last African Nations Cup in South Africa, where they had sent a youthful team with an eye on preparing for the Atlanta Olympics rather than winning the tournament in hand.

As it turned out, they reached the Final in Johannesburg, losing 2-0 to Bafana Bafana, and were ironically in poor form at the Olympics, where they got more red cards than goals.

Coach Henry Kasperczak has picked up the pieces of a Tunisian team destroyed by their failure at home in the 1994 African Nations Cup.

Not only are they making their eighth appearance in a Nations Cup finals – a tournament at which they have twice finished runners-up though never won – but they are also going to the World Cup in France.

Their key player is likely to be midfielder Zoubier Beya, with strikers Adel Sellimi and Medhi Ben Slimane offering several options in the pace department.

GROUP C NATIONS CUP 98 – BURKINA FASO

ANGOLA

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

MARITO
Goalkeeper. Petro Atletico. 20.
AURELIO
Defender. Academica Coimbra (Por). 23.
NETO
Defender. Primeiro Agosto. 26.
PAULO **DA SILVA**
Defender. Petro Atletico. 26.
JULIAO
Defender. Primeiro Agosto. 27.
CARLOS **PEDRO**
Midfielder. Espinho (Por). 29.
LITO
Midfielder. Belenenses (Por). 27.
SOUSA
Midfielder. Campomaiorense (Por). 29.
PAULAO
Midfielder. Academica Coimbra (Por). 28.
AKWA
Striker. Academica Coimbra (Por). 20.
QUINZINHO
Striker. Rio Ave (Por). 23.

Akwa

ANGOLA share language, culture and a stormy heritage with Portugal, and a lot of footballing talent, too. The exodus of Angolans to Portugal over the past 20 years means that many footballers born in Angola but raised in Portugal are now able to make a choice of playing for either country.

Portugal seems to have snapped up the best, having capped Angolan-born players such as Edgar and Jordao in recent years. But Angola have been proactively poaching too.

Before the Nations Cup in South Africa two years ago, former coach Carlos Alhinho actively held trials in Portugal, inviting all players in the country with Angolan connections.

Several were chosen from this route, granted instant Angolan citizenship and drafted into the squad for South Africa.

There are around 40 players eligible for Angola who are with clubs in the top two Portuguese divisions. The best known is striker Akwa, on loan from Benfica to Academica Coimbra, and still regarded as a potential superstar. Paulao, also on loan from Benfica to Coimbra, has been a prolific scorer on the international scene.

IVORY COAST

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

ALAIN GOUAMENE
Goalkeeper. Toulouse (Fra). 31.
LASSINA DAO
Defender. ASEC Abidjan. 26.
DIDIER ANGAN
Defender. Nice (Fra). 23.
CYRIL DOMORAUD
Defender. Marseille (Fra). 26.
PATRICE ZERE
Defender. Harelbeke (Bel). 27.
LASSINA DIABATE
Midfielder. Bordeaux (Fra). 23.
TCHIRESSOA GUEL
Midfielder. ASEC Abidjan. 22.
DONALD-OLIVIER SIE
Midfielder. Nagoya Grampus (Jap). 27.
IBRAHIM BAKAYOKO
Striker. Montpellier (Fra). 21.
JOEL TIEHI
Striker. Toulouse (Fra). 33.
AHMED OUATTARA
Striker. Sion (Swi). 30.

Joel Tiehi

THIS Nations Cup will be like playing at home for Ivory Coast, southern neighbours of Burkina Faso.

The last time the Nations Cup finals were held in west Africa, in Senegal six years ago, the Ivorians beat Ghana on penalties – their first triumph in the championship.

In South Africa, in 1996, they were surprisingly eliminated from their opening group in Port Elizabeth, finishing behind Ghana and Tunisia.

Now they will be looking to veteran Joel Tiehi, one of two survivors from the winning team in 1992. He has been in the Ivorian side for more than 10 years but despite his age (33) he is still the kingpin of the team and was joint top scorer in qualifying.

Frenchman Robert Nouzaret – who has experience at Cannes, Lyon and Montpellier – was Ivorian national team trainer at the beginning of last year, when they were in disarray, eliminated from the preliminary round of World Cup qualifiers by Congo and beaten in their first Nations Cup qualifier in Algeria.

But he has turned their fortunes round and guided them safely through the qualifying campaign.

NAMIBIA

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

FILLEMON KANALELO
Goalkeeper. Mamelodi Sundowns (SAf). 26.
PETRUS HARASEB
Defender. Liverpool. 29.
STANLEY GOAGOSEB
Defender. Civics. 30.
BIMBO TJIHERO
Defender. Liverpool. 28.
MOHAMED OUSEB
Defender. Chief Santos. 23.
RICARDO MANNETTI
Midfielder. Santos (SAf). 22.
FRANS ANANIAS
Midfielder. MP Tigers. 25.
SANDRO DE GOUVEIA
Midfielder. Blue Waters. 29.
SILVESTER GORASEB
Midfielder. Black Africa. 23.
ELIPHAS SHIVUTE
Striker. Motherwell (Sco). 26.
GERVATIUS URI KHOB
Striker. Chief Santos. 25.

THE NAMIBIANS are something of a fairytale story in the Nations Cup, having reached the finals at their second attempt.

They had won only a single game before setting out on the qualifying route for Burkina Faso, and had to go through the preliminary round before being drawn with Cameroon, Gabon and Kenya in qualifying Group 5.

This southern African nation, with a population of just 1.5 million, joined the world footballing ranks only five years ago. But they played like veterans in their qualifying matches, winning vital away points in Nairobi and Libreville.

They are still an amateur operation with all home-based players part-time and a handful playing professionally in Europe and neighbouring South Africa.

Coach Reston Mogane often has difficulty combining his work as a teacher with football, and has been forced to miss some of the Namibians' matches because he has been unable to take time away from the classroom.

The trip to Burkina Faso will be a further stop on the learning curve for the Brave Warriors, who are not expected to win a single game in their group. But they do bring an element of romance to the tournament with their achievements and aspirations.

SOUTH AFRICA

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

BRIAN BALOYI
Goalkeeper. Kaizer Chiefs. 23.
MARK FISH
Defender. Bolton Wanderers (Eng). 24.
SIZWE MOTAUNG
Defender. Kaizer Chiefs. 28.
DAVID NYATHI
Defender. St Gallen (Swi). 28.
LUCAS RADEBE
Defender. Leeds United (Eng). 28.
JOHN MOETI
Midfielder. Orlando Pirates. 30.
DUMISA NGOBE
Midfielder. Orlando Pirates. 24.
HELMAN MKHALELE
Midfielder. Kayerispor (Tur). 28.
JOHN MOSHOEU
Midfielder. Kocaelispor (Tur). 32.
PHIL MASINGA
Striker. Bari (Ita). 28.
BENEDICT McCARTHY
Striker. Ajax Amsterdam (Hol). 20.

Lucas Radebe

THE REIGNING African champions face something of a crisis of confidence as they prepare to defend the title they won on home soil.

A run of poor performances late last year, including two defeats at the Confederations Cup in Saudi Arabia, led coach Clive Barker to resign. Since then, much-travelled Frenchman Philippe Troussier has been appointed to take over in March, but he will be coaching Burkina Faso at the Nations Cup.

It means that Jomo Sono, a colourful and controversial club owner in South Africa, is acting as caretaker coach.

Sono is expected to overhaul the side that Barker consistently picked over the past three years, disposing of the likes of veteran defender Neil Tovey and England-based goalkeeper Andre Arendse and Barnsley midfielder Eric Tinkler.

There is still enough quality in the squad to ensure they make a decent defence of their title, with captain Lucas Radebe developing into a world-class defender and striker Phil Masinga a handful for any defence. But it is doubtful that Sono can add the discipline needed to convert the team into a solid unit.

GROUP D NATIONS CUP 98 – BURKINA FASO

EGYPT

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

NADER EL SAYED
Goalkeeper. Zamalek. 25.
MEHDI ABDELHADI
Defender. Zamalek. 23.
HANI RAMZY
Defender. Werder Bremen (Ger). 28
YASSER RADWAN
Defender. Hansa Rostock (Ger). 26.
AHMED HASSAN
Midfielder. Ismailia. 22.
MOHAMED YOUSSEF
Midfielder. Al Ahli. 27.
HADY KHASHABA
Midfielder. Al Ahli. 25.
HAZEM IMAM
Midfielder. Udinese (Ita). 22.
ABDELSATAR SABRY
Midfielder. Arab Contractors. 23.
ALY MAHER
Striker. Al Ahli. 24.
HOSSAM HASSAN
Striker. Al Ahli. 31.

Hossam Hassan

EGYPT have competed in a record 15 African Nations Cup finals and have won the tournament three times. Now, however, they are at a footballing crossroads, hit by successive disappointments since their last Nations Cup triumph in 1986 and their World Cup appearance in Italy, four years later.

Egyptian fans are among the most fanatical in the world and demand continued success. Their national team have not delivered of late and will be under continuing pressure to do so in Burkina Faso.

If they prove successful, then Egypt will equal Ghana's record of four Nations Cup successes. Coach Mahmoud Al-Gohari is back, having replaced Farouk Gaafar last March when Egypt started the qualifying campaign with a run of three draws.

The former military officer's magic has not exactly set the Egyptian team alight, as highlighted by a series of inconsistent performances in warm-up matches during December.

Al-Gohari won a Nations Cup title as a player. If he wins as coach at this tournament, he will be the first to do the player-coach double.

MOROCCO

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

ABDELKADER EL BRAZI
Goalkeeper. Royal Armed Forces. 23.
ABDELILAH SABER
Defender. Sporting Lisbon (Por). 23.
ABDELKRIM EL HADRIOUI
Defender. Benfica (Por). 25.
SMAHI TRIKI
Defender. Lausanne (Swi). 30.
NOUREDDINE NAYBET
Defender. Deportivo La Coruna (Spa). 27.
YOUSSEF CHIPPO
Midfielder. FC Porto (Por). 24.
RACHID AZZOUZI
Midfielder. Greuther Fruth (Ger). 26.
MUSTAPHA HADJI
Midfielder. Sporting Lisbon (Por). 26.
YOUSSEF FERTOUT
Striker. Belenenses (Por). 26.
SALAHEDDINE BASSIR
Striker. Deportivo La Coruna (Spa). 25.
SAID CHIBA
Striker. Compostela (Spa). 27.

Noureddine Naybet

THE Moroccans are Africa's top-ranked team, shooting up the FIFA standings with their emphatic performances in qualifying for the Nations Cup and World Cup finals.

They were last at the Nations Cup finals in 1992, in Senegal, surprisingly having failed to qualify for the last two stagings of the African championship. They have only won the event once, in Ethiopia in 1976, in seven attempts.

Their poor record reflects a past tendency to concentrate on World Cup qualifiers rather than this event.

For coach Henri Michel, the Nations Cup will be good preparation for France, where they have drawn Brazil, Norway and Scotland. He has a wealth of talent at his disposal and his confident bunch of players must believe they stand a good chance of success in Burkina Faso.

They include Noureddine Naybet, who won the African Champions Cup with Wydad Casablanca and furthered his reputation after going to France, Portugal and Spanish club Deportivo La Coruna.

His defensive qualities make this highly-experienced international one of Africa's leading exports to Europe and a world-class player.

MOZAMBIQUE

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

RUI EVORA
Goalkeeper. Costa do Sol. 27.
SERGIO FAIFE
Defender. Costa do Sol. 27.
LUIS
Defender. Ferroviario Maputo. 28.
TOMAS
Defender. Ferroviario Maputo. 24.
PINTO BARROS
Defender. Ferroviario Maputo. 24.
PAULITO
Midfielder. Ferroviario Maputo. 23.
MARIO ARTUR
Midfielder. Uniao Leiria (Por). 28.
JOSSIAS
Midfielder. Costa do Sol. 23.
NANA
Midfielder. Costa do Sol. 30.
CHIQUINHO CONDE
Striker. Tampa Bay Mutiny (USA). 32.
TICO-TICO
Striker. Jomo Cosmos (SAf). 24.

MOZAMBIQUE will be making their second successive African Nations Cup appearance and their third in total. But the team have only ever scored a single goal in the finals and having been drawn in the 'group of death' they cannot hold out much hope of improving on past performances.

Though Mozambique is one of the world's poorest countries, the football scene is flourishing in the wake of the end of the protracted civil war.

Club champions Ferroviario Maputo were one of the surprise packages in the 1997 African Champions League and were in the running for a place in the Final right up until the last game of the group competition.

That performance will give the national team some confidence for a difficult tournament, and captain Chiquinho Conde's return is another plus. He will be making his third Nations Cup finals appearance, and is the only survivor of the team which played in Egypt in 1986.

The 32-year-old captain is playing out his career in the United States, with Tampa Bay Mutiny.

ZAMBIA

EXPECTED STARTING LINE-UP

DAVIES PHIRI
Goalkeeper. Kabwe Warriors. 21.
HARRISON CHONGO
Defender. Al Tawun (Sau). 28.
HILARY MAKASA
Defender. Roan United. 21.
ELIJAH LITANA
Defender. Al Hilal (Sau). 27.
MORDON MALITOLI
Defender. RoPS Rovaniemi (Fin). 33.
KENNETH MALITOLI
Midfielder. Al Ittifaq (Sau). 31.
MWAPE MITI
Midfielder. Odense (Den). 24.
JONSON BWALYA
Midfielder. Delemont (Swi). 30.
ANDREW TEMBO
Midfielder. Odense (Den). 26.
KALUSHA BWALYA
Striker. Necaxa (Mex). 34.
DENIS LOTA
Striker. Sion (Swi). 24.

Elijah Litana

ALTHOUGH Zambia are the seeded team in this group, they may well find it hard to finish in the top two.

The squad are now under German coach Burkhard Ziese, who has made no secret of his ambition. The tough-talking Ziese has spelled out that there will be no automatic place for the likes of captain Kalusha Bwalya or Saudi-based defender Elijah Litana if they do not join the team for warm-up matches ahead of the event.

Bwalya is the veteran leader of the team but was much criticised last year after Zambia failed to qualify for the World Cup finals.

He is based in Mexico and his infrequent appearances for the national team led to claims that he disrupts the set-up when he comes back for important games. But the fact remains that Bwalya, a former African Footballer of the Year, is still a key to his country's success.

We saw that yet again in 1994 when he helped the team reach the Final against Nigeria. Zambia also were in the Final in 1974, beaten in a replay by Zaire.

Elijah Litana's attendance is also vital. The towering defender is the mainstay of the back four and could earn a transfer to Europe with a solid set of performances.

The dash for cash

In the first of a two-part investigation into the rapidly changing world of football finance, Gavin Hamilton reports on the rush to float Europe's clubs on the world's stock markets

FOOTBALL is no longer just a sport where winners and losers are decided on the pitch. The advent of pay TV, the Bosman ruling and increasing revenues from merchandising are combining to move the game on to a higher plane.

As we approach the millennium, football has become a multi-billion pound industry where events are influenced as much by bankers and stock market traders as by players and coaches.

FIFA has sold the TV rights to the 2002 and 2006 World Cups for £1.7billion. This summer, France will be the battleground for Adidas and Nike as they struggle for control of the global sportswear market. And across Europe, clubs are preparing to raise phenomenal sums of money through stock market flotations.

England has led the way with such deals, and it is to the English Premier League that jealous glances are directed from across Europe.

Not surprisingly, Manchester United, England's most successful football team of the 1990s, have benefited most from the unprecedented dash for cash. The English champions were ahead of the competition when they floated on the stock exchange in June 1991. Since then, shares in the club have risen by more than 700 per cent.

In their annual review of football finance, accountants Deloitte and Touche named United as the largest club in Europe (and hence the world). The Old Trafford wage bill for the year ending July 1996 (£13.275m) was less than half that of Milan (£31.4m), but their annual turnover (£53.3m) was considerably greater than the Italians' (£45.4m). This was largely due to United's merchandising revenue, which generated £18.7m, compared with Milan's £3.9m. Furthermore, United were Europe's most profitable club, with profits of £16.7m, while Milan made a £17.8m operating loss.

'If football was such a bad investment, it would not have attracted Joe Lewis's millions'

United and Tottenham (the first to float in 1983) have been joined either on the London Stock Exchange or the Alternative Investment Market by Premier League clubs Newcastle, Aston Villa, Chelsea (owned by Chelsea Village), Leeds (taken over by the Caspian Group), Bolton (taken over by Burnden Leisure) and Southampton. Virtually every other Premier League club which has not yet done so is developing plans to float.

For the clubs, flotation offers the chance to raise huge sums of money to invest in new players and, in the post-Bosman era, pay wages and signing-on fees that are rising by the week.

For the investor, there is a chance to cash in on football's involvement with the digital TV revolution.

UK football shares in 1996 rose by more than 300 per cent, but things fell flat in 1997. A report in February last year by Coopers & Lybrand estimated that British football clubs were overvalued to the tune of £1billion. That failed to deter 20,000 people who invested in The Football Fund, a portfolio of shares launched last year and backed by Alan Hansen. They are currently looking at a 17 per cent loss on their investment.

However, pay TV remains the honeypot which will generate vast sums of cash for clubs, particularly for those who entertain serious ambitions of competing in a European Superleague. And if football was such a bad investment, it would not have attracted the attention, not to mention the millions, of Joe Lewis.

Good business...Manchester United's megastore plays an important part in generating profits

The ENIC Portfolio...so far

Czech Republic: Slavia Prague	29.9% stake bought for £2m
Greece: AEK Athens	80% stake bought for £6m
Italy: Vicenza	29.9% stake bought for £2.4m
Scotland: Rangers	25% stake bought for £40m

Last year, the *Sunday Times* estimated that Lewis was Britain's richest man with a personal fortune of £3billion. In January 1997, he acquired a 25 per cent stake in Glasgow Rangers for £40m through his company the English National Investment Company (ENIC). The investment in Rangers was the first step towards the creation of a Europe-wide portfolio of football clubs.

ENIC began 1998 as it ended 1997 – acquiring clubs across Europe with a view to cashing in on football's new-found wealth. In early 1998, French club Bordeaux announced that they were seeking outside investment, believed to be from ENIC. So Bordeaux could be added to a portfolio that already includes Vicenza, AEK Athens, Slavia Prague and Rangers.

A spokesman says: "ENIC's involvement is for commercial gain, by adding to clubs' overall revenue. We bring commercial expertise, and are good dealmakers. The idea is to bring together football franchises which can earn greater income together than by being alone."

Foreign ownership of clubs is a phenomenon which looks set to increase. IMG, the company owned by Mark McCormack, recently bought French club Strasbourg. API, the UK firm run by former Olympic athlete Alan Pascoe, has a substantial stake in Major League Soccer champions DC United. Canal Plus, owners of Paris St Germain, also have a stake in Swiss club Servette.

ENGLISH clubs have been light years ahead of their European rivals in the dash for cash, but that is set to change.

By the time you read this, a meeting of Lazio's shareholders may have set in train events which could lead to the Roman club becoming the first Serie A institution to float in Italy following changes to stock exchange regulations in that country.

In Germany, as we report over the page, the flotation plans of Bayern Munich and Dortmund are well advanced.

In Spain, Atletico Madrid are considering a flotation on the Madrid Stock Exchange, but need to have been solvent for at least two years. With no football club having floated in Spain before, Atletico are believed to have been advised by Merrill Lynch, the global investment bank .

If there is any doubt as to what is behind these Europe-wide moves, which are explored in more detail overleaf, consider the following.

One of ENIC's directors is South African Robert Herzov, who is a specialist in TV sport, having previously worked in the Italian satellite TV industry. And when ENIC took over AEK Athens, they appointed George Leotsindis to run their Greek operation. He was previously in charge of a Greek pay TV company.

The ENIC enigma

Jim Holden listens to UEFA concerns about Joe Lewis, the billionaire whose company is buying clubs across Europe

Eyeing targets... Joe Lewis

UEFA has revealed its concern to WORLD SOCCER about the rapidly growing phenomenon of financial investors moving into the 'growth industry' of football.

The European soccer authority has already begun an investigation into the issue and says new regulations may be required.

A major area of worry for UEFA is the innovative scheme begun by the English National Investment Company (ENIC) to take controlling interests in a number of clubs around Europe.

ENIC has already bought significant slices of Vicenza, AEK Athens, Slavia Prague and Rangers, and is believed to be on the verge of acquiring a stake in French club Bordeaux.

The company readily reveals its aim is to build up a "family of football clubs" around Europe for "financial gain".

Owning more than one club in the same nation is against current football rules, but there is nothing to prevent anyone doing so if the clubs are in different countries.

The response of UEFA has been cautious.

Frits Ahlstrom, spokesman for UEFA, says: "We are concerned about the situation. We don't think it is a good idea for the game that so many clubs are being bought by institutions. What happens if they lose interest after a few months? What about the club and its supporters then?

"Another concern is if clubs from different countries, but owned by the same people, were to meet in European competition.

"That's not really a worry in the Cup-winners Cup, where it could happen this season with the ENIC teams. That is straight knockout, and you have to believe that the best team would win.

"But it could be different in the Champions League. What if two clubs with the same owner were in the same group and one could do the other a favour with a certain result? You could have a situation where one team was already eliminated, and could 'allow' its 'sister' side the win it needed to qualify. Then there could be a risk.

"That is a problem we are aware of. We are dealing with it, but that takes time. First we have to investigate what is really happening.

"There are no regulations which cover this area, and that is something which is already being discussed by our non-amateur committee."

While UEFA debates what to do, the ENIC idea is open to being copied by other big-money investors from financial centres like London and Frankfurt.

ENIC already feels it has been 'used' by a number of clubs who are considering flotations. Leaked 'news' that ENIC is interested in a club helps to push up its potential share price.

Who or what is ENIC? Well, it is an investment company backed by secretive Bahamas-based billionaire Joe Lewis. He is understood to have no direct interest in soccer, and no hands-on involvement, merely being an institutional investor.

ENIC is also being backed by other major investors, like Mercury Asset Management. Daniel Levy, 36, the managing director of ENIC, also readily admits he is not a big football fan, and supports no team. What he and his company do, they argue with passion, is bring a commercial acumen to football that will significantly improve the finances of a club and therefore improve its potential for success.

The traditional emotional attachment to owning a football club can lead to disaster, argues ENIC. Financial decisions can be made for flawed reasons, and leave the club facing huge debts.

But if making money is the only reason for moving into football, then the fears of UEFA that clubs will be at risk from non-committed owners who pull out if soccer stops being a good investment are understandable.

An ENIC spokesman explains: "We are building up a family of football clubs across Europe, a collection of football franchises. So far the investment has been viewed as very good. From a footballing point of view, three teams – Vicenza, AEK Athens and Slavia Prague – have reached the quarter-finals of the Cup-winners Cup.

"We have no worries if they meet each other. If they do, they do. The best team on the day will win. ENIC is not involved on the pure footballing side of the clubs.

"All clubs are viewed as separate entities, but under the commercial umbrella of ENIC.

"TV deals are one avenue for benefit. If you have 10 clubs in different countries across Europe, you can sell the rights as a lucrative package that will earn more than one club by itself."

As well as TV deals, the company also believes it can increase club revenues, through improved sponsorship, transfer deals and merchandising.

Being part of a group of clubs will bring economies of scale too. "The whole venture is in its very early stages, although momentum is building up," adds the ENIC spokesman. "ENIC is popping up as a recognised brand name and sometimes we are being used by clubs for their own ends.

"Sceptics who think we will pull out if the going gets tough are wrong. This is a long-term plan which has only just begun. Ask the fans of AEK Athens about traditional owners.

"The gate for our first match doubled because of us – the supporters had become so fed-up with the previous regime.

"Of course, there will be times when one particular club may not do so well. We will have to take a hit in that situation. But, collectively, it is going to work.

"Conditions vary so much between countries that every club needs a different strategy. Our expertise helps there as well. We only go in where the chemistry is right with those who run the football side of things."

They also only move in on clubs where the purchase price is relatively low and there is a weight of tradition, historical success and supporter potential.

The next targets are thought to be Switzerland and Scandinavia.

Unless, of course, UEFA decides to intervene with new regulations.

The dash for cash

NORWAY

Sharing in a Nordic revolution

TWO YEARS ago, Valerenga Football Club were in trouble, with more than £500,000 of debts. To add to their woes, the Oslo club were relegated from the top flight at the end of last season. These past 12 months, however, have witnessed a transformation. The club won the Norwegian Cup and bounced straight back up into the Premier Division. More to the point, they are over £4million in the black.

The way in which Valerenga accumulated the cash to finance their return to such rude health is no isolated phenomenon, but has been repeated time and again in Norwegian football in the past two years.

From Bodo/Glimt in the north to Start in Kristiansand in the south, clubs are discovering new-found riches thanks to share options. To date, more than £10m has flowed into coffers nationwide, heralding a new age for the game.

In 1995 Oslo Energi and other sponsors were persuaded that their charismatic local club, Valerenga, were worth investing in. But the £200,000 they chipped in was nothing compared to what happened 12 months later when a share issue raked in £2.5m from the man in the street. Shares that sold for about £1 then are now worth considerably more and Norway's financial newspaper, *Finansavisen*, values the club at a little over £4m.

The reason behind this investment fever is not difficult to see. Over the past few years, players figure among Norway's most profitable exports. The exodus of Norwegian footballers has created a financial revolution in the national game.

One of the main reasons why people are willing to put money into seemingly insignificant clubs is that they hope for a share in the profits when assets such as Steinar Pedersen and Ole Gunnar Solskjaer are sold to European giants such as Borussia Dortmund and Manchester United.

The potential for profits from such sales is evident. Controversial agent Rune Hauge alone has been involved in the transfer of over 70 players in 14 years, moves which generated some £50m. Investors are clearly hoping that some of the honey from the pot is going to find a way into their wallets.

Other carrots are the massive sums to be made from television rights, participation in European competition which also brings in extra funds, and last but by no means least the desire of the common fan to have a stake in his club.

It wasn't so long ago that Norwegian football was an international joke. In the 1970s, Stortinget, the country's parliament, even debated whether the ritual humiliation of inevitable defeat in international matches was worthwhile. The squad was almost as bad as the Ulleval pitch where the matches were played.

Now all that has changed. Norway are on their way to their second World Cup in a row and no English club side seems complete without an efficient, no-nonsense Norwegian in the ranks. The country is even exporting managers.

The man brought in to turn Valerenga's fortunes around is Jon Nordbrekken. "Whether we like it or not, money has become a prerequisite for success in Norwegian football," he says. "There is no room any more for amateurs without solid financial backing."

For some, this development is not entirely welcome because, the argument runs, it opens up the possibility of powerful investors who know nothing about football taking over the running of the club. Molde, for instance, is 'owned' by high-flying businessmen Kjell Inge Rokke and Bjorn Rune Gjelsten, with more than 50 per cent of the shares. Recently, they also took over Wimbledon.

However, Nordbrekken is confident that the danger of outsiders deciding what happens on the field of play is non-existent: "We have a very clear agreement between Valerenga Football Club and Valerenga A/S [plc]. It means that the football club deals with sporting decisions like the buying and selling of players and appointment of coaches."

Erik Jensen of Premier Division side Stabaek is of the same opinion: "There will always be a majority of members from the football club on our committee in order to avert any extreme decisions being taken."

Others prefer to look upon the injection of funds as the key to future success. "These are exciting times for us," says Stabaek's Tom Schelvan. "As the worth of the club rises, we will be in a stronger position to make financial commitments and that will effect sporting development."

Thor Gronnerud of the Norwegian FA adds that the cash injection will be important because it may mean being able to keep talent in the country instead of standing idly by as it flees abroad. Currently, there are over 50 Norwegians on foreign books, from Greece to Great Britain.

The most notable exception to the clamour for cash comes from Norway's most successful club, Rosenborg, who to the consternation of Europe's bigger clubs have acquitted themselves well in the Champions League this season. Without the benefit of a share issue, the club from Trondheim have a healthy balance of more than £8m because they receive a steady trickle of transfer and television money.

"All this talk of shares and the stock exchange does not go down well at Rosenborg," says chairman Nils Skutle. "Our greatest asset is people and our main goal is a sporting one."

Maybe. But according to club director Rune Bratseth they would dearly like to be able to buy back the likes of Steffen Iversen from Tottenham Hotspur to help their European campaign.

Only a serious injection of capital from issuing shares would give them that sort of money. Not even Rosenborg may be able to resist that temptation.

Michael Butcher

Income generated by share issues in Norway

Molde	£4.25m
Valerenga	£2.5m
Lillestrom	£1.3m
Stabaek	£1.2m
Brann	£790,000
Bodo/Glimt	£430,000
Start	£310,000

Battling together...Borussia and Bayern are both in the race to go public

GERMANY

Big two bid to catch up

BAYERN MUNICH and Borussia Dortmund are the twin financial giants of the German game. They attract the biggest sponsorship sums and the longest queues at the merchandising counters.

But both believe that stock exchange flotation is the only path to be followed to guarantee the opportunity of further international success. Lacking that, neither Bayern nor Borussia believe it will be possible for them – or other German clubs – to keep pace with financial developments in England, Spain and Italy.

Dortmund president Gerd Niebaum and his Bayern counterpart, Franz Beckenbauer, both named a stock market listing as one of their top priorities after being re-elected before Christmas.

Niebaum intends to convert Borussia into a plc by next year at the latest. He said: "To stay competitive, we must follow the English example and change our structures. There is no other way."

Beckenbauer believes Bayern will be buried under a rush of other clubs unless they hurry to the market. He said: "We are already under a lot of pressure from sponsors and TV over various commercial issues. If we stand still then in five or 10 years at the most we will be finished. The only answer is to take a new direction for a German sports club and that means becoming a public company."

The snag in Germany, as in neighbouring France, is that sports clubs have been organised under mutual ownership membership arrangements, allowing for income of both commercial and state or local authority subsidy.

The German federation has been reluctant to consider a change of legal and business status for its top clubs. But the recent supreme court ruling that clubs and not the federation should control television rights for European matches was a further signal that the game's commercial and financial foundations must be rebuilt – with the go-ahead being granted later this year.

Many German clubs, amateur-run outfits less than 40 years ago, now have business volumes the size of medium-sized companies. Bayern had a turnover of £51m and profits of £5m last year. Compare that with a turnover of £25m and a profit of only £70,000 in 1994, the year Beckenbauer became president.

The number of club members, who might be regarded as potential share buyers, rose to 71,157 last year from 33,000 four years ago.

As for Borussia, they ended 1997 with a record annual turnover of £43m compared with £32m the previous year.

No wonder that, with lucrative sponsorship and TV deals available, with stadia often full even for run-of-the-mill League games and vast merchandising catalogues on offer to the fans, the clubs want to exploit the market.

Bayern, for example, already have one major project just awaiting the financial go-ahead which a shares issue would provide – the construction of their own new stadium.

Keir Radnedge

ITALY

Making up for lost time

DECEMBER 9 will go down in European football history as the day Italy started to fight back. For the best part of the previous three years, clubs, officials, media and fans had stared aghast at the way in which the re-financed English game had threatened to steal their thunder as the Mecca of the world game.

Italy had long boasted more lucrative TV deals than England but now not only was Italy falling behind on that score but the clubs – perpetually debt-ridden institutions dependent on wealthy benefactors often with more money than sense – could not complete in terms of underlying wealth.

Of course, the likes of the Agnelli, Berlusconi and Mantovani clans were not blind to the financial opportunities offered by stock market flotation. Their problem was that, in Italy, companies needed to show they had been in profit for three years to gain permission to go to the market, and not even Juventus or Milan could do that.

Juventus were the first club to start to attack the problem, hence the remarkable transfer policy operated over the past three years under the direction of executive director Roberto Bettega. The idea was to bring Juventus into profit and keep them there while maintaining success on the pitch. It's a policy which was worked far more successfully than even Juventus insiders had dared hope.

But the pressure to go to the market was becoming unbearable, hence the decision of the top clubs to consider floating in London, where the entry rules were not so restrictive. That, plus the English financial incursion at Vicenza, sowed the seeds of panic in the Italian financial markets.

Thus, on December 9, the Italian stock market regulatory agency Consob announced it is making it easier for clubs to list on the Milan stock exchange by setting aside, just for football clubs, the three-year profits rule.

Now, clubs must merely prove that they are in a condition to generate profits and have sufficient assets to provide security in the event of poor results on the pitch. But the likes of Milan and Juventus should have few problems there. Along with Inter, Vicenza and Lazio, they are expected to push ahead with share flotation plans in the near future.

Ironically, the three-year rule is likely to be wiped away all together in the near future. Football leads the way.

Keir Radnedge

FRANCE

The danger of being also-rans

LEADING French clubs are demanding urgent changes to their legal status in a bid to make up lost ground on their cash-rich overseas competitors.

Since professionalism came to France in 1932, the operating ethos has been stuck in a timewarp, with clubs largely funded by local government and regarded as civic entertainment rather than businesses.

Envious of the greater financial clout of clubs elsewhere in Europe, dominant French sides Paris Saint-Germain and Olympique Marseille are lobbying hard for the right to act as true commercial enterprises and to finally be allowed to raise additional funds by floating on the stock market.

The concerns of the likes of PSG and OM are clear. Although the biggest fish in the domestic pond are backed by the Canal Plus TV station and Adidas sportswear respectively, the coffers of the Big Two pale in comparison to those of the top clubs in England, Italy and Spain. For example, PSG's £17m annual budget is the largest in France, but only 22nd in Europe.

"In France we have to ask whether we want our clubs to be competitive or not," says PSG vice-chairman Bernard Brochand. "At the moment we are at a distinct disadvantage compared to our rivals elsewhere on the continent.

"French law forbids us becoming a plc and from paying dividends. But that extra capital raised by a stock market listing would put us in the big league."

Strasbourg are another club who favour the plc route. They were taken over by Mark McCormack's IMG sports marketing agency last summer – IMG bought the council's major shareholding in the club for just £500,000 – and the new management team see stock market flotation as the key to their plans to transform the club.

"The days when councils influenced the running of a football club are over," claims Strasbourg general manager Bernard Gardon. "Privatised clubs are the future. We are putting in place here the infrastructure of a modern club. If clubs want to float, they should be free to do so. How else can we attract the prominent investors to enable us to compete at the highest level?"

Bordeaux are the latest French club to seeking outside investment, believed to be from the ENIC group. The new investors are likely to seek a stock market flotation.

Currently, the French First Division contains two types of football outfits: seven independently run top clubs who enjoy some commercial freedom but do not have the right to be involved in share issues, and 11 smaller outfits whose financial affairs are jointly overseen by club officials and local councillors.

But according to French League supremo Noel Le Graet, it would be foolish for all clubs to join a headlong dash for limited company status: "Ambitious teams with powerful commercial backers will obviously find it a useful exercise to float on the stock market. However, it is not the answer for clubs at the other end of the scale. If a club and its council work well together, why change?

"I am worried by the haste with which some local authorities are looking to sever all links with their clubs. But we will find investors in the public sector to take their place. We've cleaned up our sport after the scandals of the late 80s and early 90s. There is absolutely no reason why businessmen should not see French football as a wise investment."

Nick Bidwell

Next month...
Winners and losers
Who stands to gain from football's dash for cash – and who loses out

History in the making

First promoted team to win the Bundesliga? Maybe, says Nick Bidwell

Brilliant man-manager...coach Otto Rehhagel

DEEP in western Germany, a group of footballers are working on a redraft of Bundesliga history. Kaiserslautern, the first newly-promoted team in 35 years to top the table at the halfway point, have left everyone trailing in their wake with a highly-effective brand of power football.

Since their opening-day trip to reigning champions Bayern Munich, where they had a morale-boosting 1-0 win, Kaiserslautern have gone from strength to strength, with 13 victories, three draws and only three defeats, opening a four-point lead at the top.

Ironically, those defeats were all against lesser lights: Werder Bremen, Wolfsburg and fellow newcomers Hertha Berlin. But look at the big-name scalps taken by the *Roten Teufel* (Red Devils); Bayern Munich have been toppled twice, UEFA Cup holders Schalke and in-form Stuttgart have succumbed, while creditable draws have been achieved against Champions League quarter-finalists Bayer Leverkusen and with World and European champions Borussia Dortmund.

All this reflects great credit on a club with one of the smallest budgets in the country, a club renowned for their fair play as well as for their skill: up to now, only Borussia Monchengladbach have committed fewer fouls this season.

Veteran defender Andy Brehme says: "I don't want to hear anybody claiming we've been lucky. We've got where we are by our own efforts. This place is a football hotbed. When we were relegated in 1996, that was very hard to come to terms with, because it was the first time in our history.

"But we battled our way to promotion last season, and have kept up that form ever since."

Brehme adds: "It's definitely to our advantage that we play only one Bundesliga game a week, whereas others such as Bayern Munich and Dortmund also have to concentrate on the Champions League. But you can't take anything away from us. We deserve to be top."

Other reasons for the team's success are not hard to find, and include the fanatical backing they receive from their always-packed Betzenberg stadium, and the team's extraordinary togetherness.

Superstars are in short supply among the *Lauterer*. Swiss playmaker Ciriaco Sforza, in his second spell after time with Bayern Munich and Inter, is one, but they do not have a single regular starter for Germany.

Yet the absence of household names has not prevented the team from flattening the majority of those who have crossed their path in recent months.

Economy of effort is not an option in this part of Germany. Everyone works tirelessly for each other, opponents are kept under pressure for 90 minutes, and no cause is given up as lost. The fact that Kaiserslautern have managed so many late equalisers and winners speaks for itself.

Sweeper Miroslav Kadlec explains: "Our success is down to one thing – teamwork. There's solidarity in this team. No cliques. No prima donnas.

"We're all in this together, and we approach every match as a battle we must win. Right now, we expect to do that every week. I've never known such spirit and confidence."

'We're all in this together and we approach every match as a battle. I've never known such spirit and confidence' – Miroslav Kadlec

Kaiserslautern will be hoping to maintain their remarkable form at set-piece situations once play resumes in the championship race. Sforza, Andy Buck and Brazilian Ratinho all deliver quality passes with a dead ball, and Olaf Marschall – top scorer with 13 goals – Harry Koch and Danish utility player Michael Schjonberg are strong in the air. So conceding free-kicks and corners to the Red Devils is not an option for their opponents.

The main ingredient in the Operation Tabletopper recipe, however, is the influence of coach Otto Rehhagel, the passionate and charismatic boss who took charge in the summer of 1996.

Rehhagel, who used to play for the *Lauterer*, knows all about remodelling unfancied provincial outfits into trophy-winning teams.

During a brilliant 14-year stay at Werder Bremen, he won a couple of Bundesliga titles, two German Cups, and the 1992 Cup-winners Cup. Now he looks like doing something similar at Kaiserslautern.

Rehhagel, an authoritarian figure but very protective of his players, has few peers as a man-manager. With his perfectionism and tactical awareness, he ranks among the foremost German coaches of recent times.

Establishing a lead over Bayern Munich and overcoming them home and away must be a satisfying feeling for Rehhagel. After all, his only negative managerial experience was at Bayern, when he was fired three weeks from the end of 95-96, even though his team had reached the Final of the UEFA Cup.

That was a cruel blow for a dedicated and proud man, but he has responded by taking Kaiserslautern from the Second Division to the Bundesliga's summit.

Earlier this season Rehhagel laughed at the suggestion that his club were on course for a fourth title, after 1951, 1953 (when they provided several of the following year's winning World Cup squad) and 1991.

He insisted that Bundesliga survival was the limit of their ambition, but now he sounds much more optimistic: "We can win the title, but on one condition – that we avoid major injuries. We had a wonderful start, but we have to keep a sense of perspective. In football, the only truth is to be found on the pitch. Declarations in the media don't win titles. Consistent teams do."

No longer a fall guy...keeper Andreas Reinke

THE COACH

Otto REHHAGEL (9.8.38)
A miner's son from the Ruhr and a professional with Rot-Weiss Essen, Hertha Berlin and Kaiserslautern. Began a brilliant coaching career in 1972, and progressed via Saarbrucken, Kickers Offenbach, Werder Bremen, Borussia Dortmund, Arminia Bielefeld and Fortuna Dusseldorf, then returned to Bremen. Won the Bundesliga title in 1988 and 1993, the German Cup in 1991 and 1994, and the Cup-winners Cup in 1992. Created a huge stir in 1995 by taking over at Bayern Munich, but was sacked before the season was out. Joined relegated Kaiserslautern at the start of 1996-97 and immediately sparked a revival. His team ran away with the Second Division title and now lead the Bundesliga. Calm, urbane and eloquent when not on the touchline.

GOALKEEPERS

Andreas REINKE (10.1.69)
No longer the gaffe-prone No. 1 who struggled to impress after moving from Hamburg St Pauli in 1994. Brave, with great reflexes, and consistent. A key figure in the championship challenge, and a contender for a place in the World Cup squad.

Gerald EHRMAN (18.2.59)
With the club since 1984, and a Bundesliga winner in 1990-91. An intense competitor who matches Rehhagel for sideline histrionics. Previously with Koln.

DEFENDERS

Harry KOCH (15.11.69)
With his 70s-style curly perm and full-blooded commitment, this uncompromising stopper is a cult hero with the fans. First came to national prominence in autumn 1994, when his regional side Vestenbergsreuth dumped Bayern Munich out of the German Cup. Joined Red Devils the following season.

Golden oldie...Andy Brehme

Axel ROOS (19.8.64)
One-club man, having joined in 1979, and an under-rated but complete defender. Tenacious man-marker and sufficiently comfortable on the ball to play in midfield if necessary.

Roger LUTZ (15.7.64)
Recently clocked his 10th year with his only pro club. Specialises in looking after the opposition's danger man – Dortmund's Andy Moller is a favourite. Not a regular these days, but always gives value when called on.

Michael SCHJONBERG-CHRISTENSEN (DEN) (19.1.67)
A key player in Denmark's World Cup plans, and a revelation since his arrival from Odense in 1996. Usually a midfielder with the Danes, but Rehhagel prefers him in central defence. Won a German Cup medal in 1992 with Second Division Hannover, scoring the decisive goal in the shootout against Borussia Monchengladbach.

Miroslav KADLEC (CZE) (22.6.64)
Talented Czech sweeper who helped the *Lauterer* win the Bundesliga in 1991, his first season. Previously with Hradiste Cheb and Vitkovice in his homeland, and played 64 times for his country before quitting the international arena.

Andreas BREHME (9.11.60)
Scorer of Germany's winning penalty in the Italia 90 Final. Now in the twilight of a fine career and used only sparingly, but still has a lot to offer in terms of experience and spirit. Won 86 caps and is in his second spell at the Betzenberg stadium after serving Saarbrucken, Bayern Munich, Inter and Zaragoza.

Oliver SCHAFER (27.2.69)
Abrasive central defender signed from Freiburg in 1991. Opportunities limited due to Schjonberg and Koch.

MIDFIELDERS

Andreas BUCK (29.12.67)
Stuttgart let him go last summer, but he has been one of the main suppliers to the *Lauterer*'s forwards down both flanks. Won the Bundesliga with Stuttgart in 1991-92.

Martin WAGNER (24.2.68)
Skipper, industrious playmaker and striker of a mean free-kick. Bought from Nurnberg six years ago, and a member of the World Cup squad in 1994, but has not added to his five caps since. Hit the only goal in the 1996 German Cup Final.

Marian HRISTOV (BUL) (29.7.73)
A summer signing from Levski Sofia. Usually on the bench, but has looked good as an attacking midfielder, notably with late goals in home wins over Hamburg and Bayern Munich.

Top scorer...striker Olaf Marschall

Ciriaco SFORZA (SWI) (2.3.70)
Failed to inspire Switzerland to World Cup qualification, but in excellent form for his club. His passing, eye for goal, superb delivery from set-pieces and determination have done much to keep Kaiserslautern on course for the title. First joined the club from Grasshopper in 1993, then played for Bayern Munich and Inter before returning to the Betzenberg for £2.6million last summer.

Everson Rodrigues, RATINHO (BRA) (8.6.71)
Neat and clever Brazilian whose creativity is much admired by Rehhagel. Played for Matsubara and Atletico Paranaense before going to Switzerland at 21 and playing for St Gallen and Arau. Joined Kaiserslautern in 1996. His nickname, Little Mouse, was given to him as a kid because of his love of cheese.

Thomas RIEDL (18.6.76)
Son of Hannes Riedl, who played for Duisburg and Kaiserslautern in the 70s. Slightly-built schemer finding the competition rather too hot.

FORWARDS

Pavel KUKA (CZE) (19.7.68)
No longer first choice, but still doing the business for the Czech Republic. Joined from Slavia Prague in 93-94 and scored 24 goals in his first 18 months.

Olaf MARSCHALL (19.3.66)
Top Bundesliga scorer in the first half of the season, scoring 13 goals in as many matches. Earned a call to the national squad and got off the bench to score in the 4-3 win over Albania that clinched a World Cup place. Won four caps for East Germany and helped Lokomotiv Leipzig to the 1987 Cup-winners Cup Final, which they lost to Ajax. Played for Admira Wacker and Dynamo Dresden before moving to Kaiserslautern in 1994.

Jurgen RISCHE (30.10.70)
Was top Second Division scorer with Leipzig in 1995, relegated with Kaiserslautern, then promoted with them and doing well in the top flight.

Marco REICH (30.12.77)
One of Germany's most talented young forwards. Joined the club aged 15 and his speed and talent down the left flank have brought him to the forefront.

Pushing for a recall...Pavel Kuka

Kaiserslautern – How they line up

Joy division...Fabio Galante and Youri Djorkaeff (right) celebrate the Frenchman's winner against Juve

Inter (and Ronaldo) earn their stripes

The Brazilian has made all the difference to the Milan club's title push. Paddy Agnew on the first half of the Serie A season

WHO'S AFRAID of Inter Milan? Answer: just about everybody. As we come to the halfway point in the Serie A championship, it is becoming every week more apparent that those who bet against Inter winning this season's League title do so at their own risk.

Inter have led the championship race practically from the starting stalls. Throughout the autumn their detractors have catalogued just about every reason imaginable as to why they will not win the title.

They have no real attacking conviction but rather rely on an old-fashioned counter-attack, it was said. They are too dependent on Brazilian star Ronaldo. Coach Gigi Simoni will crack under the pressure of leading Serie A. Major rivals such as Juventus and Milan have yet to play their best and when they do so, then it will be 'Goodbye Inter'. And so on.

Inter, however, have absorbed all the criticism and kept on trucking. With the exception of Simoni, who has not put a foot wrong, all the above critiques contain a grain of truth. Certainly, results either side of Christmas would suggest that Inter with Ronaldo and Inter without Ronaldo are two vastly different sides.

While the Brazilian star was off winning the Confederations Cup in Saudi Arabia for Brazil, Inter slumped to their first and so far only defeat of the season when beaten 1-0 by revitalised Udinese. When Ronaldo reappeared for duty in the first game of the New Year, he it was who inspired the League leaders in their 1-0 win over champions Juventus in what was undoubtedly Inter's biggest test so far.

Ronaldo's contribution to that victory was proof positive that if patience really is the hallmark of genius, then we need have no more worries about the Brazilian's star qualities. His contribution to the home win against Juventus was short on work rate quantity but it was breathtakingly strong on match-winning quality.

We have said it before but it is worth repeating that 'The Phenomenon' is an atypical Brazilian footballer. One tends to expect a Brazilian to base his game on a seemingly flawless and instinctive technique in which deft touch and tight control mesmerise opponents. Ronaldo, however, bases his matchwinning skills on a cold, calculating use of two specific attributes – his lightning-fast reflexes and his feline capacity for infinite patience.

Against Juventus we saw a classic example of quintessential Ronaldo. By half-time, he had touched the ball four or five times in a game in which he had been largely a spectator as his side were outplayed by an attack-minded Juventus. Two minutes into the second half, he turned the game on its head.

Receiving the ball wide on the right, he first left the Uruguayan international Paolo Montero on his backside before accelerating away from the crude tackle of another defender, Mark Iuliano. Having used his turbo pace to break clear, Ronaldo then looked up to assess the situation and, seeing his team-mate Youri Djorkaeff steaming in towards the far post, laid on the perfect pass to outflank the defence and leave the Frenchman with a relatively straightforward tap-in.

That one action was almost the sum total of Ronaldo's contribution to the night's soccer but it clinched the three points. Little wonder that Juventus coach Marcello Lippi complained afterwards: "I still get the impression that we did not deserve to lose this important game."

Juventus had indeed played well. Galvanised by their last-gasp Champions League quarter-final qualification pre-Christmas, they have started the New Year looking much more like the side of the last two seasons. Still perhaps lightweight in an attack led by Filippo Inzaghi and Alessandro Del Piero, Juventus have however been strengthened by the arrival of former Ajax Amsterdam and Milan Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids.

Looking at recent Juventus performances, one could hardly disagree with coach Lippi when he said: "Inter may well do great things this season...but I'm still convinced that we can win the title because we have a huge belief in our abilities."

That kind of belief seems to have deserted the Napoli squad, the club currently experiencing their worst season since the halcyon days of Argentine genius Diego Maradona. With five points from their first 14 Serie A games, Napoli come to the halfway point staring relegation straight in the face.

Coaches Bortolo Mutti and Carlo Mazzone have come and gone but even the third man at the helm, Giovanni Galeone, has failed to change the losing shape of things, having presided over a 4-0 home thrashing by Parma and a 6-3 defeat at Sampdoria in two of his first four games in charge.

In hindsight, it would appear that the sale last summer of players such as Brazilian Andre Cruz (Milan), Fabio Pecchia (Juventus) and Frenchman Alain Boghossian (Sampdoria) has stretched an already limited squad strength to well beyond breaking point. Further confirmation that the situation was close to desperation point came from two news items.

Firstly, there was speculation that the club's major shareholder, industrialist Corrado Ferlaino, might be interested in selling. Secondly, and rather more alarmingly, came media reports that Napoli were interested in tempting the ageing (and retired, we thought) Maradona back to the city to once again work his magic for them, as a player. Perhaps the purchase of 31-year-old Croat midfielder Aljosa Asanovic, from English side Derby County, may prove of more immediate value to Napoli's compromising position.

As we head towards the end of January shut-off date for purchases, some big-name clubs have been making frantic last-minute efforts to strengthen their championship challenge. As already mentioned, Juventus have done well with the purchase of Davids, while Milan have picked up useful striker Maurizio Ganz from neighbours Inter and are also reputedly interested in signing Fabrizio Ravanelli from Marseille. Meanwhile 'O Animal', Brazilian Edmundo, has arrived at Fiorentina to add his weight to an attack already led by one of the best strikers around, Argentinian Gabriel Batistuta.

Metz marching on

The halfway leaders are bang on course for a Champions League spot

MYSTERIOUS METZ? Miraculous Metz? However one chooses to describe them, Metz ended the halfway stage of the championship top of the table, having displaced Monaco after a sensational 3-0 home victory over them, bringing back memories of the Metz of some years ago, who had the temerity to go to Barcelona and attack them in the European Cup.

This time they are already out of Europe, eliminated somewhat disappointingly by the Germans of Karlsruhe. Though they are understandably wary about making any claims on the title, they have strong hopes of at least second place, which would of course earn them a Champions League place next season.

Their defeat of Monaco followed an honourable draw at the Parc des Princes against Paris Saint-Germain. They've done especially well against the top teams this season, and have yet to lose to any of their title rivals. Monaco for one must be sick of the sight of the upstarts.

Their coach, Jean Tigana, protested angrily that the first of Metz's goals should have been disallowed – and the penalty which led to their second never given. It was driven in by the Corsican Bruno Rodriguez, after Vladan Lukic had notionally been fouled by Dumas. Television afterwards suggested that Tigana had a point.

He was incensed. "To ensure there are no more cheats," he exploded, "they should be given a four-match suspension, after having seen the replays."

But Metz are unquestionably on a remarkable roll. What has made the difference this season? Their manager, Joel Muller, says: "By comparison with other seasons, it is this kind of match – the draw in Paris – which shows what progress we have made. Not just the result, but the way we did it.

"Not like two years ago when we won at Parc des Princes with a couple of rifle shots! There was less self-assurance in our play then.

"There is talent, and this season it is functioning well. Suddenly, we don't suffer from complexes when we play the big teams."

Spirit measure...Meyrieu (centre) has typified the team's all for one and one for all attitude

Referees weren't fooled by Ravanelli's old tricks

It is a team full of good players, but without any one outstanding star name. In midfield, the experienced Fred Meyrieu is having an excellent season, and enjoying himself, he says, more than he has ever done in French football. Returning from Swiss club Sion, together with the able Yugoslav striker Lukic, he has found an excellent team spirit, even if in some quarters it seems to be fashionable among players to see that good relations in the dressing-room count for very little.

But Meyrieu emphasises that Metz simply haven't got the playing resources of the richer clubs, that if "two or three key players are injured at the same time", it could be disastrous. For the moment, he says, the objective should be to finish in the top five, thus guaranteeing a place of some sort in Europe next season.

If Metz can stay at the top for a while, he admits, they will go all out to win the title. "But a second-place finish would still be extraordinary."

Meyrieu said that he soon saw the squad's potential in their pre-season matches, mostly against foreign opposition. He realised how much a midfield consisting of himself, Jocelyn Blanchard, Belgian Danny Boffin and gifted international Robert Pires could achieve.

Moreover, he is well aware that Metz's run-in looks a good deal less demanding than those of the other chief championship contenders.

Let us hope that Metz stay free of injuries.

Marseille, one of the more illustrious clubs who did beat Metz – 2-0 – have reinforced their attack with the return of international striker Christophe Dugarry, as unhappy at Barcelona as he was with Milan.

Moreover, Marseille have been boosted by the news that, despite all the problems Fabrizio Ravanelli has been having with referees since being accused of diving for a penalty, he swears he has no intention of leaving. He is very happy indeed; as Dugarry should be now.

Marseille are by no means out of the title running yet, as they showed before the winter break with a 1-0 win at stubborn Lens, the goal scored by yet another French international, Xavier Gravelaine.

Another gifted striker, the somewhat star-crossed Mickael Madar, has found his way to Premier League strugglers Everton after disappointing days in Spain at Deportivo La Coruna, where he locked horns with the Brazilian manager Carlos Alberto Silva.

Now Madar is desperate to make up for lost time and still has hopes of getting into the international squad; however, he does not look to have picked the ideal team to help him achieve that particular ambition.

Andre Duclos

SPAIN

Fabri-cation

Real dole out the dosh but don't taste the nosh in a mealy-mouthed saga, reports Graham Turner

REMEMBER the old one about the guy who boasts about going into a restaurant, paying for a meal and then running out without eating it? Real Madrid have written a footballing version by paying Portuguesa £6.17million for 21-year-old midfielder Rodrigo Fabri and letting Flamengo have him on their table until June 1999.

We wait to see if the tasty Brazilian dish will have gone cold by then or become an even hotter property.

The dish-out-the-dosh-and-dash-out story confirms how complex the transfer market has now become. Or, more to the point, how cut-throat it has become.

While Real fans were putting a magnifying glass to Brazil's Olympic and Under-20 squads in a bid to suss out Rodrigo's pedigree, up stepped Deportivo president Augusto Cesar Lendoiro, banned by FIFA until August but still suspiciously hyper-active.

He claimed that the food which Real had paid for but not eaten actually belonged on his plate. And, just in case there was somebody who was not totally confused, he produced a contract allegedly signed by himself, an agent, Rodrigo and – wait for it – Rodrigo's mother, dated August 1997. The contract, that is, not his mother.

Lendoiro's threats to take the matter to FIFA (they banned him from going to the civil courts) fell on somewhat waxy ears in Madrid, where Real's president, Lorenzo Sanz, remarked that, as Rodrigo was under contract to Portuguesa to the end of 1998, a contract dated 23.8.97 was damning evidence of an illegal approach…

Staying with La Coruna for a moment, it is becoming increasingly difficult to find a foreigner they haven't got an option on. During the winter transfer window, Lendoiro off-loaded two of his Spanish mohicans (Nando and Alfredo to Second Division Sevilla) and spent another £10.29m on Mustapha Hadji (Sporting Lisbon), Lionel and Mauro Scaloni (both from Estudiantes), Manteca Martinez (Boca Juniors) and a character called Washington Sebastian Abreu, who has become a folk-hero among Spanish TV viewers as a result of video footage of the Argentinian League.

Abreu has missed a series of unmissable open goals while playing for San Lorenzo de Almagro, and the major problem for a 21-year-old who has represented Uruguay at football, basketball and volleyball is deciding which of them he's actually playing. Fair's fair: he also has hit some brilliant goals – and will need to hit some more to have any chance of shaking off a £4.6m price-tag or his 'And Abreu Must Score' image.

That left Lendoiro with more than 20 foreigners – and five Spaniards – on the books of a team deep in the relegation zone. What's more, the Galicians are being prevented from hiring a replacement for Jose Manuel Corral, as legislation bars the recruitment of a new coach until the old one – Carlos Alberto Silva in this case – has been paid off.

Back to Brazil…Ze Roberto is heading home after a short spell at Bernabeu

At the time of writing, Silva is presenting his case to FIFA and Lendoiro is presenting Silva a belated offer of £165,000 in compensation.

Deportivo looked like sliding deeper into the manure when they opened 1998 by going 1-0 down to Sporting Gijon, who had set all sorts of records by taking three points from 18 fixtures and, with Jose Manuel Diaz Novoa returning to the club, failing to win under three different managers. Then Nourredine Naybet equalised, before Abreu took a chance even he couldn't miss to lift La Coruna to 16th place in the table.

Lendoiro's attempt to convert Deportivo into a sort of Galicia Globetrotters is symptomatic of the continued trend towards foreign recruitment and away from home-grown youngsters who have brilliantly represented Spain in all age-limit competitions. In the first half of the one-month transfer window, Deportivo spent £31m. Only three of the deals involved Spaniards and they were all free transfers.

Real Madrid were first in line when the sales signs went up – but only time will tell if they have found bargains. Tracking back to Rodrigo, he was part of a costly operation which also brought midfielder Savio from Flamengo and took fellow Brazilian Ze Roberto, signed just a few months ago, back to his homeland.

The other major acquisition was Christian Karembeu, finally prised away from Sampdoria for a fee described as £2.1m by Real and £3.5m plus the proceeds from a friendly by the Italian club's president, Enrico Mantovani. Karembeu would have become a free agent at the end of the season.

Real's ambitions, however, are more short-term. President Sanz ushered in the New Year by reiterating his resolution to take the Champions Cup to Bernabeu for the seventh time, and the first in 32 years. Even though the quarter-final draw against Bayer Leverkusen could have been worse, coach Jupp Heynckes insisted that he was still a couple of sandwiches short of a European picnic. Hence the immediate investment in versatile defender/midfielder Karembeu and left-side midfielder Savio.

The bottom line, as usual, is a direct threat to local players, with Jaime, Sanchis and Amavisca favourites to lose their places to the newcomers.

Karembeu, who has signed a five-year contract, has finally ended his miserable spell in Genoa. At the start of the season, he had scored six goals in 62 Serie A games for Sampdoria. But when the Italian club agreed to a transfer to Barcelona, it was revealed that Karembeu had agreed terms with Real Madrid. As the tug-of-war continued through the corridors of FIFA, Sampdoria announced that the player was suspended. He

The winter moves (so far)

Club	In	Out
At. Madrid	Pablo Garcia (Wanderers)	Roberto (Espanyol – on loan)
Barcelona	Winston Bogarde (Milan)	Christophe Dugarry (Marseille)
Compostela	Tabuenka (Bilbao) Pignol (Aubagne) Hernandez (Lyon)	
Deportivo	Lionel (Estudiantes) Scaloni (Estudiantes) Hadji (Sporting Lisbon) Martinez (Boca Juniors) Abreu (San Lorenzo)	Madar (Everton) Nando (Sevilla) Alfredo (Sevilla)
Mallorca	Milijas (Zemun)	Duah (Leiria) David (Hercules) Barbero (Hercules)
Real Madrid	Savio (Flamengo) Rodrigo (Portuguesa but loaned to Flamengo) Karembeu (Sampdoria)	Ze Roberto (Flamengo)
Real Sociedad	Cvitanovic (Croatia Zagreb)	Albistegi (Alaves)
Salamanca	Lombardi (River Plate)	Miljanovic (Hercules)
Valencia	Ilie (Galatasaray)	Romario (Flamengo)
Valladolid	Klimowicz (Rayo) Heinze (Newell's OB)	

has not played any League matches this season and at 27 he must work hard in training to recover the form he showed at Nantes.

Savio Bortolini Pimentel, born in Sao Torquato in January 1974, landed in Madrid with 90 goals in his baggage. Having been signed until 2003 with a buy-out clause of £60m, he was duly wheeled out for the last 17 minutes of Real's opening game of 1998, away to Betis. But it wasn't the best scenario for the formation of judgments.

Madrid, who had looked the better ball-playing side for long periods, twice came back to equalise, but not a third time. The 3-2 defeat was their first away reverse in the League and reinforced their misery at conceding the honorary title of winter champions to rivals Barcelona.

Courting more controversy...Jesus Gil

Down at Nou Camp, there wasn't a great deal going on in the boot room. Winston Bogarde had long since arrived from Milan and Christophe Dugarry had been sold to Olympique Marseille for £3.7m. But off the pitch all hell had been breaking loose.

An opposition group to the president Josep Lluis Nunez, had been formed under the bizarre name of The Blue Elephant. Their first move was to set in motion a motion of censure which, if successful, could oblige the entire board to resign. This required the signatures of at least 4,624 *socios* and the club, timidly backed by Catalan authorities unsure about correct procedures, announced the time-scale would be identical to an election. So the motion had to be signed, sealed and delivered by December 31.

By midnight on New Year's Eve nobody – for once – had seen a Blue Elephant and the club pronounced the matter closed, claiming the jumbo had been all mumbo.

The Elephant, however, refused to pack the trunk and say goodbye to the circus. Legal action was threatened (which could reach a conclusion somewhere around the final phase of Euro 2000) and, having previously summoned as many reporters as they could find, the mahouts built a ceremony around Johan Cruyff's decision to climb aboard the Elefant Blau.

Cruyff is not renowned as a fervent admirer of the man who fired him in 1996 and he accompanied his ceremonial signature with some unceremonious criticisms of Nunez and his "undemocratic" regime.

Among the accusations levelled was that of having shoved Carles Rexach out of the door. The presence of so many coaches – Van Gaal, Van der Lem, Hoek, Mourinho, Robson, Alexanko and Serra Ferrer – had left Charly complaining that he hadn't enough room to screw in a set of long studs. So off he went to coach Yokohama Flugels, accompanied by Jose Ramon Alexanko and, as a further pronunciation test, former winger Jordi Roura.

Cruyff maintains that pushing Rexach out after 38 years at the club is proof that Nunez has gone absolutely cuckoo. But while Barcelona were watching One Flugel Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Valencia fans were discovering former president Francisco Roig and his henchmen also had been playing cuckoos – laying eggs in other nests.

When the board decided on a share issue which increased the club's value to £6.3m, a ceiling of nine shares per person was imposed. Now it has transpired that farmers, tailors and candlestick-makers became shareholders in their sleep and, while unconscious, signed them over to Roig and his fellow directors, who were evidently aiming to get their hands on a controlling interest.

The lawyers are now at work while former vice-president Pedro Cortes tries to keep the ship on an even keel. He concluded the signing of Romanian striker Adrian Ilie from Galatasaray and was helped by a couple of good results which kept Claudio Ranieri's UEFA Cup ambitions intact. But Valencia started 1998 with a 2-1 home defeat by Artur Jorge's Tenerife, and at this stage only Gijon had lost more games.

Their form has been disappointing, not only for the irate locals but also for those who hoped that the title race would have more than two horses.

Atletico Madrid have scored more goals than any other team in Spain and are unarguably the most attractive to watch in terms of playing and letting the other team play. Sadly, president Jesus Gil has again reached for the instability button.

He – and nobody else – described Atletico's 3-1 defeat in Barcelona as "daylight robbery" and he continues to blame every single refereeing error on a pre-plotted campaign by the Spanish federation's president, Angel Villar, and general secretary Gerardo Gonzalez.

Gil, barred by FIFA from representing the club until August, has hired Jean-Marc Bosman's lawyer to take the matter through the courts – which will hardly endear him to anybody in the game – and has vowed to force Villar and Gonzalez out of office.

His use of the club as a launching pad for personal vendettas is a source of embarrassment for his players and counter-productive for the club, but he continues his bull-in-a-china-shop routine seemingly unaware that, in his one-man war, there can be no winners. Only losers.

Spanish football started 1998 as it finished 1997 – offering great football but posing serious questions about the way the clubs are being administered.

Pro-file Joseba Etxeberria

Battling Basque muscling in on France 98

Club Athletic Bilbao
Country Spain
Born August 5, 1977, in Elgoibar
Previous club Real Sociedad
International debut November 1997, v Romania
International caps 1 (1 goal)

MOST kids growing up in Spain's proudly independent Basque region dream of donning the shirt of either Athletic Bilbao or San Sebastian's Real Sociedad. Joseba Etxeberria was lucky enough to play for both as a teenager – and not have to pinch himself to wake up afterwards.

Etxeberria made his Real Sociedad debut aged 17, in January 1995, and by the end of the season he had managed another six games. After that campaign, he received a surprise call-up to Spain's squad for the World Under-20 Championship in Qatar, muscling his way into the side and finishing as the tournament's top scorer with six goals.

On the basis of those performances, Athletic Bilbao swiftly coughed up Etxeberria's £2million buy-out clause, at the time a domestic transfer record for a Spanish player. Critics reckoned the fee was exaggerated, but Bilbao's Basques-only philosophy gives them so little to choose from, they clearly believed a rough diamond like Etxeberria was worth the gamble. Not surprisingly, Real Sociedad were outraged at this cradle-snatching and a war of words ensued between the erstwhile good neighbours.

Ironically, Athletic could have saved themselves the trouble, not to mention the money. "I had trials at Lezama [Athletic's nursery set-up] when I was nine," says Etxeberria, "but they didn't show any interest so I had to go back to my village. Then, when I was 11 I joined Real's juniors."

But there's no mystery about why he walked out on a club that nurtured him for another that initially spurned him – Athletic offer him a better chance of silverware and greater financial rewards. "I'm proud to play for one of the three ever-present sides in the Spanish First Division," he says. "The big difference is that while Real Madrid and Barcelona have always relied on foreign players, Athletic get along fine with just Basques."

Even so, the striker's first two seasons at San Mames were not easy. "I know the fans had their doubts in my first year, and maybe I tried too hard to justify my fee; the harder I tried the worse things got," he admits.

Etxeberria's goals in Qatar created false expectations, as well; as 17 goals in 91 League outings to date demonstrate, he is anything but a natural goalscorer. Neither is the built-like-a-brick-outhouse youngster an elegant forward in the mode of past Athletic greats like Manu Sarabia or Chechu Rojo. Etxeberria is a sleeves rolled-up, 90-minute whirlwind; a player who does much of his best work down the flanks and is as likely to carve out chances for team-mates as score himself.

Etxeberria's competitive nature is highly appreciated by team coach Luis Fernandez and Spain coach Javier Clemente. Etxeberria made his international debut in a 1-1 draw against Romania last year and marked the occasion by scoring.

"There's a formidable atmosphere in the Spanish squad," says the player. "Clemente has worked to create a real one-for-all attitude and that's reflected on the pitch. It's highly motivating to know that Clemente has got his eye on me and I'll be working like crazy to try and force my way into the World Cup squad."

If he does, and if Etxeberria's prodigious work-rate proves an ideal blend with the skills of Raul, Kiko, Alfonso and co, it's the opposition defences that are likely to go crazy.

Jeff King

GERMANY

Seeing red...Samuel Kuffour's sending off sent Uli Hoeness into a rage

Franz foots the bill as Uli loses his head

FRANZ BECKENBAUER has dipped into his own pocket to sort out an angry stand-off between Uli Hoeness and the German federation. Hoeness, Bayern Munich's general manager, had been refusing to pay a 'loose change' fine imposed for his comments to referee Hellmut Krug after the 2-2 draw with 1860 in the Munich derby.

Hoeness lost his temper after the expulsion of Bayern's Ghanaian defender, Samuel Kuffour, in the 68th minute. At the final whistle, he told Krug the expulsion had been "unjustified" and "over the top". According to Krug's report, Hoeness also said any ambition the referee had to become Germany's No. 1 was "laughable in the extreme".

Hoeness was charged with misconduct by the federation and fined £2,500.

Disciplinary commissioner Klaus Hilpert said: "In the circumstances it was a modest fine. We cannot have referees treated this way after matches. Everyone knows that tempers can get inflamed but after the final whistle it's all over." But Hoeness was furious and refused to pay. He said: "I'm not complaining about the size of the fine. It's loose change. It's the principle involved. It's a matter of the right to free speech.

"I didn't insult the referee personally – if I had I would have been in the wrong and I would have been the first to apologise for such an outburst. But his decision was wrong and I don't think I should be penalised for saying so. I have a right to my opinion. I also happen to think that Herr Krug is the most arrogant referee we have, but that's neither here nor there. What I am not prepared to accept is being gagged."

One compromise solution would have been for Bayern to pay the fine. But that would have needed the approval of the club's senior executive – Hoeness. In the end, as a New Year gesture, president Beckenbauer paid. Hoeness said: "The club needed a peace deal so Franz took care of it without us having to concede the principle."

No doubt Hoeness's temper had not been improved by seeing Bayern slip further in the title race, losing 2-0 to leaders Kaiserslautern as the first half of the season drew to a close. This is the first time in the 34 years of the Bundesliga that a promoted club have won the so-called autumn championship. The result also meant that Kaiserslautern completed a rare double, having beaten Bayern 1-0 on the opening day.

Defeat will now concentrate Bayern minds even more firmly on their Champions League quarter-final tie against Borussia Dortmund, and the German Cup, in which they are home to holders Stuttgart in the semi-finals. In the other semi-final, giantkillers Eintracht Trier face MSV Duisburg.

Two coaches who have already been rewarded for their achievements this season are Kaiserslautern's Otto Rehhagel and Leverkusen's Christoph Daum. Daum, who has guided Champions League newcomers Leverkusen into the quarter-finals, has had his contract extended until 2001, while Rehhagel will be seeing the job through to 2000.

As usual, transfer activity has centred around Bayern, with the midfield likely to fall apart at the season's end. Dieter Hamann is thinking over an offer from Atletico Madrid while Christian Nerlinger has agreed to join Dortmund, where his father played.

Meanwhile, Kaiserslautern have been considering sending for US striker Eric Wynalda as cover for top scorer Olaf Marschall, out with a knee ligament injury. Wynalda has been playing for San Jose Clash in MLS. He made 54 Bundesliga appearances for Saarbrucken in 1992-93 and Bochum in 1994-95.

Keir Radnedge

SWITZERLAND

Gress instead of Gross

GILBERT GRESS is the man chosen to reverse the Swiss national team's rapid slide down the world rankings.

The departure of Christian Gross from Grasshopper for Tottenham and the rejection note from Borussia Dortmund's Ottmar Hitzfeld – poised to succeed Bobby Robson as super-scout at Barcelona – left few options.

Just as Ipswich Town were once the apparent proving ground for future England managers (Sir Alf Ramsey and Robson), so Xamax Neuchatel are the club with the magic touch in Switzerland.

It was from Xamax that Switzerland plucked Roy Hodgson, who went on to take the country through to the finals of both the World Cup in 1994 and European Championship – for the first time – in 1996.

It is hoped that Gress, despite his failure to keep Xamax out of the relegation play-off, can work similar wonders. The only hitch in negotiations which delayed a formal agreement was Xamax president Gilbert Facchinetti's demand that Gress should stay until the end of the season.

That was not expected to be a problem, because European Championship qualifying will not start until the autumn.

Gress, born on December 17, 1941, was a star midfielder with Strasbourg (1960-66), Stuttgart (1966-71), Marseille (1971-73) and Strasbourg again (1973-75). He then moved to Xamax in 1975, where he spent two seasons as player-coach. After retiring, he returned as team boss to Strasbourg (1977-80), guiding them to the French championship in 1979.

After one season in Belgium with Brugge, Gress went back to Switzerland, winning the championship in 1987 and 1988 during a nine-year spell with Xamax. He bossed Servette in 1990-91, had three years back at Strasbourg, then returned to Xamax in 1994.

Swiss role...Gilbert Gress

Keir Radnedge

HOLLAND

Not so good, but still the best

AJAX seem to be romping away with the League title once again, despite losing 4-3 at home to PSV, their nearest rivals. Edwin van der Sar conceded as many goals as he had done in the previous 12 matches, but Ajax still have a 12-point lead.

Fans are far from satisfied, and recognise that recent victories by narrow margins,against Twente and De Graafschap in the League and Udinese and Bochum in Europe, have been achieved by individual skill as much as by teamwork.

The Bochum game looked like being a disaster when the Germans led 2-0 after 20 minutes before Ajax came back to win. They now play Moscow Spartak, while Roda, the only other Dutch club left in Europe, meet Vicenza in the Cup-winners Cup.

Danish defender Ole Tobiasen is likely to miss most of the rest of the season for Ajax, with a knee injury. He could even be out of the World Cup.

On that subject, coach Guus Hiddink and his squad were well pleased with the draw for France 98, which put the Dutch in a pool with Belgium, South Korea and Mexico. As skipper Frank de Boer put it: "If we can't reach the second round we shouldn't be there at all."

However, Patrick Kluivert may miss out on the finals because of a possible court appearance to give his version of an alleged rape. The original hearing was dropped because of lack of evidence, but if the case is reopened his chances of going to France 98 may well be reduced.

Mark Wotte is the new coach at Utrecht, but only after a legal battle over compensation with ADO Den Haag. Eventually the clubs agreed a smaller fee than the one ADO originally proposed.

Klaas-Jan Droppert

PORTUGAL

Azevedo against 'Thatcher'

GRAEME SOUNESS is still making the news as he rebuilds Benfica's squad, but his boss, Vale Azevedo, is getting even more headlines as he rebuilds the club's structure.

Azevedo, elected chairman late last year, is caught in a mass of accusations and counter-accusations, notably about his relations with the company Olivedesportos.

Under Azevedo, Benfica's directors have cancelled all contracts with Olivedesportos, thus preventing any direct TV transmission from their stadium. The directors claim that the company had influenced decisions made by the previous Benfica chairman, Manuel Damasio, and other clubs.

Not long after this decision was taken, some TV channels and newspapers reported that a warrant had been issued and Azevedo would be arrested within hours, for mishandling funds belonging to others and for disregarding a court order to attend a hearing.

Azevedo, a lawyer, denied the accusations at a dramatic media conference, the authorities also denied the existence of a warrant, and no arrest was made.

According to Azevedo, he is opposing a pyramid of public figures and organisations who are keen to see his downfall. He named, among others, Leonor Beleze, a former Secretary of State for Health and a controversial figure in Portuguese politics. She is said to be a Porto supporter – and to want to be Portugal's Margaret Thatcher.

Control of televised football is at the core of the disagreements between Azevedo and the pyramid, and even the club's loyal supporters are not entirely convinced that the chairman is going down the right path. If he abandons Benfica's traditional values, and goes along with some of the marketing strategies being mooted, he could be in for more trouble – from his own people. They are watching him carefully.

They also are watching Souness carefully, and so far he has done little wrong. Even in a 2-0 defeat away to Porto there was a lot to admire, notably the form shown by the three debutants, Poborsky, Kandaurov and Luis Carlos. Considering that they had all been at the club less than a week, they did very well.

The defeat, however, left Benfica 14 points behind the leaders. Although Souness claims that the title is not yet lost, few would agree.

Alberto da Silva

BELGIUM

Haan back at Anderlecht

AS ONE door – at Feyenoord – was closed in Arie Haan's face, another opened for him when Anderlecht welcomed back their former player as coach for the second time. It apparently mattered not to the mauve and whites, who were hurriedly seeking a successor to Rene Vandereycken that the 49-year-old Haan had been a failure with the Dutch club, who sacked him after a string of defeats.

What obviously influenced Anderlecht was the memory of their title triumph in 1986-87 during Haan's previous two-year spell as coach. As a player at Parc Astrid, the Dutch midfielder had won the title once and shared in two Belgian Cup triumphs, as well as victories in the Cup-winners Cup and European Super Cup.

Another man ignoring the old adage that it never pays to go back is Stanley Menzo, the popular Dutch goalkeeper who had originally joined the exodus from Lierse following last season's title triumph. He went to Bordeaux and made a significant contribution to their rise up the French League, but could not learn the language and felt ostracised. When Menzo's successor at Lierse, Philippe Vande Walle, complained at his treatment from the fans, the stage was set for Menzo's return.

The outburst from Vande Walle, a summer signing from Cup winners Ekeren, followed the 2-0 Champions League home defeat by Leverkusen. After being blamed for both goals, he protested: "I have been hurt by the constant insults since the start of the season and I will never play for Lierse again." Jos Daerden, the Lierse coach, gave Vande Walle his wish, transferring him to Aalst with the parting comment: "These are the remarks of a kid of 20, not a veteran of 36."

Vande Walle is doubtless anticipating with rather less than wholehearted enthusiasm Aalst's visit to Lierse on February 7.

Club Brugge went into the New Year as overwhelming favourites to lift the title for the 11th time. A run of six successive victories leading up to the month-long mid-season break enabled Eric Gerets's unbeaten side to stretch their lead over Genk to a massive 14 points. The outcome is regarded as such a formality that Canal Plus chose not to screen any of Brugge's games live for the first month after the resumption.

Nicholas Harling

Will Baggie fit the bill?...West Brom's Andy Hunt could play for Austria

AUSTRIA

Thoughts turn to France

THOUGHTS are more on snow sports and winter breaks than soccer midway through the lay-off, but coaches cannot hibernate peacefully when there are preparations to see to, least of all the man in charge of the national squad, Herbert Prohaska, who took his charges off to France.

The home-based players and those with German clubs such as Tony Polster (Koln), Frank Wohlfahrt (Stuttgart) and Andreas Herzog (Werder Bremen) were with Prohaska near Bordeaux, although second goalkeeper Michael Konsel was not released by Lazio and the others playing for southern European clubs also had to miss the week.

One hopeful is a 'New Austrian'. Andy Hunt of West Bromwich Albion has discovered that one of his grandmothers was of Central European origin, and has indicated this to the federation. Whether his season's tally of 12 goals in 29 matches for the Baggies will be enough reason for Prohaska to see him in action remains to be seen but goal power is not abundant, with due respect to Toni Polster, who is not getting any younger.

After the surge of Salzburg in recent campaigns and now that of Sturm and GAK, perhaps the re-modelled FC Linz, too, can come up with the goods in the second half of the season.

Bob Vaughan

REP IRELAND

Shelbourne strike as Saints slip

IT WAS a bad start to the New Year for St Patrick's Athletic, long-time leaders of the FAI Premier Division. They lost at home to Sligo Rovers in their first game of 1998, and Dublin rivals Shelbourne took full advantage to go top on goal difference.

Even so, the Saints have a good away record and if they can win instead of drawing home games, they could still be champions.

Pat Dolan, who took over from Brian Kerr 12 months ago, has done a good job, blending youth and experience. Trevor Molloy, Colin Hawkins and Thomas Morgan from the Irish Under-20 team are all now with St Patrick's.

Former Northern Ireland goalkeeper Trevor Wood was a good buy and Dolan, who played youth football for Arsenal, called on the experience of former North London rival Ian Gilzean to try to solve their scoring problem when he was released by Sligo Rovers earlier this season.

The other main challengers for the title are Cork City, for whom former Lincoln striker Jason Kabia is impressing.

Brian Kerr has been voted Manager of the Year after leading the Under-20 team to third place in the world finals in Malaysia last summer.

Shamrock Rovers will soon know if their plans to move to the Dublin suburb of Tallaght meet with planning approval. The Hoops, who have been sharing Tolka Park with Shelbourne this season, want to build a new stadium, but have faced local objections.

Rovers have been without a permanent home since the Kilcoyne brothers sold Glenmalure Park in the mid-80s. Since then they have been based at Tolka Park (twice), Dalymount Park and the Royal Dublin Society.

Sean Creedon

LUXEMBOURG

Rumelange clanger

ROUND THREE of the Luxembourg Cup was full of surprises, including the biggest for years when Rumelange lost 3-1 to a Fourth Division club, Union Reisdorf.

Other shocks were Union Luxembourg's 2-1 defeat at Hobscheid, Niederkorn's 1-0 success against FC Wiltz, Cercle Hollerich's 4-2 disposal of Red Boys, and Grevenmacher's 5-1 victory over the holders, Jeunesse Esch.

Two other National Division teams only just got through, Spora needing extra-time to beat Redingen 1-0 and Petange winning 3-2 against Tricolore Gasperich with a last-minute penalty.

In the League, Union lead by six points and at the other end Red Boys look doomed, still without a victory.

Referee Roger Phillippe has retired at 45 and has now taken over as president of the Luxembourg Football Federation in a joint appointment with Laurent Mosar, president of Aris Bonnevoie.

Tim Brice

ENGLAND

Klinsmann 'comes home'

Mercenary or missionary? Gavin Hamilton on an unlikely return to the Premier League

HE LEFT in acrimonious circumstances in 1995 after scoring 29 goals in one trail-blazing season and being voted Footballer of the Year. But Jurgen Klinsmann is back at Tottenham and says he is determined to help the north London club out of their predicament – in the Premier League relegation zone.

After exercising a get-out clause in his original two-year contract with Spurs, Klinsmann won the UEFA Cup and Bundesliga title with Bayern Munich and captained his country to victory at Euro 96. He joined Italy's Sampdoria on a free transfer last summer but has returned to Spurs until the end of the season for a £175,000 fee.

"It's a wonderful club – it's a feeling of coming home," said Klinsmann. "I've had approaches from many Premier League clubs but I couldn't go anywhere else – it would be impossible after the way I was treated.

"I've played at a few clubs and have had different experiences in different countries but I never had that feeling again like I had here. Before, it was impossible for me to come back but the situation changed and I am delighted to be here."

Presumably, wages rumoured to be in the region of £40,000 a week made his decision easier. As did Samp's appointment of coach Vujadin Boskov in place of Cesar Luis Menotti in November. Klinsmann, who had missed seven weeks with an ankle injury, was due to line up for Samp in a three-man Serie A attack alongside Vincenzo Montella and Bepe Signori against leaders Inter.

But when Boskov changed his mind, announcing on TV that the German would start on the bench, Klinsmann decided his future lay elsewhere. "I went to see Boskov and said he should have told me first – what happened took away the basis of working with that person. I went to see [club owner] Enrico Mantovani and he said he would support me in any decision I made – that's why the fee was so low."

For Spurs chairman Alan Sugar, the signing of Klinsmann involved the consumption of a large slice of humble pie. After the German returned home in 1995, Sugar raged about "Carlos Kickaballs" and claimed in a memorable TV interview that he would not wash his car with Klinsmann's No 18 Spurs shirt.

"Maybe I was a bit naive about football contracts back then," said Sugar. "But we are on very good terms now and have been for several years."

The Spurs chairman is well aware that his club need a huge lift if they are to avoid involvement in what threatens to be a very bloody relegation battle. Whether Klinsmann is the man to save Spurs' season is debatable. His success in 1994-95 owed a great deal to his partnership with Teddy Sheringham, now with Manchester United. What's more, Klinsmann is now 33 and has been troubled with injuries since the summer.

Swiss coach Christian Gross, who shares the same lawyer/agent as Klinsmann, has done little to improve Spurs' plight since arriving in November. He presided over heavy defeats by Chelsea, Coventry and Aston Villa and it will not have taken him long to realise that his players are desperately lacking in confidence – something Klinsmann can provide. But the German national team captain can do little about the club's almost perpetual injury list. For that, Gross is pinning his hopes on fitness coach Fritz Schmid.

Gross, linked with the vacant Switzerland manager's job, refused to deny that he would resign if Tottenham's appeal against the Department of Employment refusal to grant Schmid a work permit failed. The coach has since committed himself to Spurs, but Schmid was back in Switzerland at press time.

Spurs are by no means the only big club struggling at the wrong end of the table. Everton are keeping them company in the bottom three – with Newcastle, title contenders at the start of the season, six points above the relegation places and 20 points behind leaders Manchester United.

Klinsmann...sweet on renewing his acquaintance with Tottenham chairman Alan Sugar

Newcastle manager Kenny Dalglish, who has been criticised for not buying a replacement for Alan Shearer (injured and not expected to appear before March), tried to revive his team's fortunes with a £4million bid for Everton's Welsh international midfielder Gary Speed. Everton manager Howard Kendall refused the offer, as well as a £5m bid from Sheffield Wednesday, before Wednesday eventually met Everton's valuation of £6m.

Kendall was hoping to have money to spend on new players from the proposed £3m sale of England full-back Andy Hinchcliffe to Spurs, but time is running out and his problems are mounting. Especially after a home defeat by Newcastle knocked Kendall's young side out of the FA Cup. The scorer was substitute Ian Rush: his 26th goal against Everton and his 43rd in the competition.

There were a handful of upsets in the third round of the Cup. Non-league Stevenage Borough put out First Division Swindon Town and were rewarded with a home tie against Newcastle. Port Vale held Arsenal 0-0 at Highbury. And Coventry, a fortnight after losing to Liverpool in the League, won 3-1 on their return to Anfield. Liverpool were without 18-year-old striker Michael Owen, who is fast emerging as a powerful force for his club and, potentially, country.

England coach Glenn Hoddle, maybe in an attempt to halt an 'Owen for the World Cup' bandwagon, warned the teenager about the need to behave himself on and off the pitch. His comments were strange to say the least. Owen, though still learning the game, is level-headed and undeserving of the Spice Boys tag applied to some of Anfield's more exuberant employees.

One FA Cup match which lived up to its billing as tie of the third round was champions Manchester United's visit to Cup-holders Chelsea. Alex Ferguson identified Chelsea as the biggest challenge to United in the League, but any hopes Chelsea had of snatching a psychological advantage were buried in an avalanche of goals. United, 3-0 up by half-time, added two more before Chelsea rallied with three late goals.

It has often been said the Premier League contains three leagues: a Big Five (United, Liverpool, Arsenal, Newcastle and Chelsea), former powers who can no longer compete financially with the Big Five (Everton, Leeds, Tottenham) and perennial strugglers (Palace, Bolton, Coventry, Southampton). This season, there are just two leagues: Manchester United and the rest.

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SCOTLAND

Celtic pile on the pressure

A TRADITIONALLY volatile period led to a tightening-up of matters at the top of the Premier Division. Celtic bared their teeth in dramatic fashion, beating Rangers at Parkhead in the New Year Old Firm meeting, a fixture they had not won for 10 years.

Second-half goals from Craig Burley (unquestionably Celtic's most productive signing in recent times) and Paul Lambert (his first since joining the club from Borussia Dortmund) led to victory, and the result proved to Rangers that they are likely to face their most severe championship challenge for many years.

Paul Gascoigne was on the bench for most of the game, as he returned from a four-match suspension arising from being sent off in the last Old Firm encounter. His creativity was sorely missed as Rangers struggled to harness their free-flowing opponents.

Gascoigne has a remarkable ability to allow himself to be wound up by opposing fans. This was illustrated as he stupidly played an imaginary flute while warming up in front of the Celtic supporters. He had been warned earlier in the season about the folly of such a sectarian gesture, and there can be little to say in Gascoigne's defence. The matter was reported to the police and Rangers agreed to conduct an internal investigation.

The acquisition of Norwegian international Harald Brattbakk, who has performed so well in the Champions League for Rosenberg, has further strengthened Celtic's attack and has given renewed optimism to the fans, who cling to the hope that their team can finally halt the Rangers juggernaut.

Hearts, too, could divert the championship race in an unexpected direction. They led the table before Christmas, and defeats by both members of the Old Firm were not seen as being of any particular significance to the Tynecastle management, who maintained they could win the League without the need to beat Celtic or Rangers.

Then a disappointing result against city rivals Hibs, when they had to settle for a draw having being 2-0 up after 10 minutes, undermined their challenge.

Hibs remain entrenched at the foot of the Premier Division, alongside Motherwell, while Aberdeen – under the astute stewardship of new manager Alex Miller – are gradually pulling away from the danger area.

Administratively, there are likely to be changes in the Scottish League set-up next season as the top clubs continue to push towards a breakaway Premiership. Animosity has been apparent from the smaller clubs, who feel they are being sacrificed, but indications are that a compromise may soon be achieved. That is likely to incorporate a 12-team Premiership with promotion and relegation retained as an integral feature.

Alan Fairley

WALES

Budget burdens hit two in the pocket

CASH crises at Ebbw Vale and Cemaes Ynys Mon dampened New Year cheer.

At Vale, matters seem to be resolved, with players being paid overdue wages and a rescue deal imminent. Vale played in the 97 InterToto Cup, and there seems to be a link between that event and money problems.

The first Welsh representatives, Ton Pentre, quit the League at the end of last season – citing financial worries – while their successors, Conwy United, were forced to undertake a massive budget cut to offset a reported £60,000 debt.

Prior to the departure of chairman and benefactor Joe Davis, the weekly budget at Cemaes was £1,100. That was cut to £600 with the appointment of Steve Edwards as caretaker manager, but he was dismissed in the first week of the year and Billy Abbott, formerly in charge of youth development, took over. The budget was cut again – to zero!

Abbott's squad will consist entirely of the youngsters who formed the reserve team in the Anglesey League – effectively the Welsh Fifth Division – who have offered their services free.

Mel Ap Ior Thomas

N. IRELAND

Violent times return

FAN trouble reared its ugly head with missile-throwing incidents making unpleasant headlines.

Coleraine's clash with Linfield was abandoned in the 82nd minute by referee Alan Snoddy after stones and a lump of concrete were thrown on to the pitch, with Coleraine 1-0 up against nine men.

The Belfast derby between Linfield and Glentoran at the Oval was halted by referee John Ferry for eight minutes after fans threw stones, bottles and coins. It ended 1-1 before a 10,000 crowd, with Linfield boss David Jeffrey condemning the "mindless idiots" who are dragging the game through the mud.

Irish FA secretary David Bowen claims a tiny minority of hooligans are responsible, and there will be an inquiry into these and other incidents – including an attack on a Ballymena United supporters' bus at Coleraine.

Glenavon boss Nigel Best was shown the door a couple of days before the third anniversary of his appointment following a home defeat by bottom club Ards. Ironically, a couple of days later, Glenavon defeated Coleraine 4-2 in the Final of the Gold Cup but are finding it hard to attract a new manager.

Roy Kitson

Pro-file Rio Ferdinand

Young defender on a steep learning curve

Club West Ham
Country England
Born November 7, 1978, in London
International debut November 15, 1997, v Cameroon
International caps 1

ANY YOUNG West Ham defender making an impression in the England side is bound to be labelled 'the next Bobby Moore'.

After all, England's late 1966 World Cup winning skipper also hailed from the Upton Park academy, and in Rio Ferdinand, England coach Glenn Hoddle may very well have unearthed a player who is capable of treading in the footsteps of the legendary Moore at France 98.

That he will still be only 19 by the time the world converges on France in the summer has done little to dampen the enthusiasm of the English press for Rio, cousin of Tottenham and England striker Les Ferdinand.

"A defender with guile and skill, the sort England have not produced for many a year," is a billing the younger Ferdinand, is having to deal with. And as he burst from defence to set up a chance for Robbie Fowler while making his full England debut in the friendly against Cameroon last November, the scribes could not contain themselves.

"I like to pass the ball to a claret and blue shirt, or a white shirt if I'm lucky enough to be in the England side," says Ferdinand who began his career as a striker. "I'm not one to just lump it up the field, but I don't go out there with the specific aim of trying to make breaks into the attacking half. Things just happen in a game and you do it on instinct.

"It's flattering to see nice things written about me, comparing me with some of the best players of all time. But I'm not getting carried away by it.

"People try to put pressure on, but I don't let that get to me. If they want to say I'm the next big thing in English football there is nothing I can do about it. But comparing me with Bobby Moore is a bit much. There will only ever be one Bobby. If I achieve half of what he did, I'll be happy."

With Hoddle on record as stating his desire to identify a suitable candidate to fill the sweeper's role, Ferdinand's arrival has been viewed as the chance to transform the English side for years to come. But the boss remains adamant that the teenager needs time.

"He looks very good and may well be the sort of player we are looking for," says Hoddle. "But I can't see him being ready for the World Cup. We have only five games before our first in France.

"Rio certainly has a chance to play his part in the 2000 European Championships and beyond, but he has a long way to go before being the complete player, and he doesn't need me to tell him that."

Hoddle seems keen to play down Ferdinand's emergence, and the public dressing down he handed out last year highlighted a determination to mould his young players into complete professionals.

Ferdinand would have made his international debut earlier had it not been for a drink-driving offence a few days before the squad met. Hoddle was not willing to accept such indiscipline and removed him from his party, much to Rio's embarrassment.

"It is all about maturity and I need that quickly," he says. "I'm playing at the highest level and need to adapt. If you learn from mistakes you make when you're young, then they have been worthwhile."

Kevin Palmer

Looking for an opening...Brian Laudrup could be heading for England

DENMARK

London calling for livewire Laudrup

WITH THE Danish season in hibernation, the most intense speculation concerns the next move to be made by Brian Laudrup, whose contract with Rangers is due to expire in the summer.

From January 1, under new transfer regulations, he could talk to any of the 20 clubs who immediately showed an interest in signing him.

But the younger of the precocious Laudrup brothers – now aged 28 – immediately appeared to narrow the field by ruling out a switch to Italy, France or Spain, saying that he preferred to remain in Britain.

The only other option for the lively, attacking midfielder, is likely to be a move to Ajax, where he could fulfil his dream of playing alongside brother Michael at club level.

In the past 12 months, Laudrup has been close to signing for Ajax, Chelsea and Manchester United, but each time Rangers owner David Murray blocked the deal.

Laudrup said he would love to live in London, where internationals such as Dennis Bergkamp talk about enjoying the relative anonymity provided by the city.

But he also desperately wants to play for a club with "a good chance" of winning the Champions League, which will encourage United and Ajax – now coached by a former Danish skipper, Morten Olsen.

Another player on the move, Silkeborg's Jesper Thygesen, is ready to join halfway League leaders Brondby after failing to get a contract at Sheffield United.

Back home, 33-year-old Erik Boye from Vejle was the surprise choice as goalkeeper of the year, ahead of Peter Schmeichel.

"Me?" said Boye. "There must have been some mistake." The reaction of the modest keeper undervalued his fine contribution to Vejle's excellent year.

Jim Holden

NORWAY

Future is sunny side up for Eggen

THIS is the time of year that the domestic game is at a standstill and the players have just started their preparations for a new season, so it is those Norwegians abroad who are at their busiest.

In addition to the 27 currently playing in England, others are trying their luck in different countries.

Dan Eggen left Danish club Brondby last summer to continue his career under the Spanish sun, with Celta Vigo. He needed some time to adjust to the new surroundings but has now settled in.

Eggen earned himself a reputation as a goal-scoring central defender with Brondby and netted in Celta's 1-0 win against Mallorca. His next goal was in a clash with Barcelona – unfortunately, against his own goalkeeper.

"When I was given the opportunity to play in the Spanish League, I felt it was right for me, even though many people say I am more suited to the English game," says Eggen.

He was in Norway's squad for the last World Cup finals and even though the competition in central defennce is tough, he hopes to travel to France as well.

Ole Martin Aarst, who impressed in Tromso's Cup-winners Cup matches, is now at Anderlecht. After a poor start to the season, the Belgian club seem to have turned the corner, thanks in part to Aarst's goals. The 23-year-old may be too inexperienced to win a World Cup place, but remains an exciting prospect.

Two who are expected to figure in the squad for France are Frank Strandli and Erik Mykland. These old pals who used to play for Start Kristiansand have had their ups and downs, but are now together again with Greek club Panathinaikos and doing well.

Sigurd Odegaard

SWEDEN

Striking a chord

IS THERE a future in the new-look national squad set-up for Halmstad striker Mats Lilienberg?

In the past, he was hardly ever in the frame, with Martin Dahlin and Kennet Andersson scoring freely at the highest level. But Sweden's doomed World Cup campaign must have given coach Tommy Soderberg food for thought.

Too often they dominated a game without turning their advantage into goals – for example, during their 1-0 defeat in Scotland.

So the time could be right for Lilienberg, last season's top League scorer with 14 goals.

The 28-year-old has won three caps, but they came during his Trelleborg days. After that, his career dived, first with 1860 Munich and then IFK Gothenburg, where he was mainly held in reserve.

But Lilienberg insists: "I had two wonderful years in Gothenburg. I was delighted when Halmstad won the League last season, but I wasn't trying to settle any old scores against IFK."

Henrik Larsson – whose career has been revived since moving from Dutch club Feyenoord to Scotland's Celtic – is another striker sure to come under Soderberg's scrutiny.

Former international defender Aage Hareide is the new coach of Helsingborg. He was one of the first Norwegians to try his luck in England, appearing for Manchester City and Norwich.

AIK have snapped up Under-21 stars Olof Mellberg and Mario Rahmberg from relegated Degerfors.

Finally, spare a thought for Moses Nsubuga of Elfsborg – once tipped as a future Swedish international – who has had a leg amputated after a car crash.

Pentti Hietanen

FINLAND

Jeremenko gets seven-year itch

ALEKSEI Jeremenko's seven-year spell in Finland is at an end.

Arguably the best import to have ever played in Finland, 'Jere' is joining Tromso of Norway, after almost single-handedly keeping FF Jaro in the top division.

Tromso also have signed Jaro's international stopper Marko Tuomela, who recently had trials with Motherwell.

Cup-winners FC Haka have lost their talented teenager Teemu Tainio, to Auxerre of France.

Pentti Hietanen

● IN ICELAND, *writes Rab Christie*, the FA has concluded a watershed agreement with German company UFA, who have bought the broadcasting rights to Icelandic soccer for the next four seasons for £1.25million, with more cash to follow.

GREECE

Clubs see red over mounting debts

AFTER taking measures to combat crowd violence, the Greek government have turned to soccer's shaky finances, and are disputing the legality of the union of football limited companies, EPAE.

"Whoever has a legal interest can contest whatever decision is taken by EPAE, because its composition is not legal," said Sports Under-Secretary Andreas Fouras.

"AEK are among those professional teams with a balance sheet showing a deficit, and have obtained a loan from the parent company in order to make transfers as normal."

Most Greek professional soccer clubs are "loss-making" and "illegal", says the Development Ministry. Several clubs have not submitted their balance sheet for the fiscal year to June 30, 1997, and the 18 clubs in the First Division have total debts amounting to £50million.

Public Order Minister George Romeos took a two-day trip to London to check how soccer violence is handled in the United Kingdom. He said on his return

that Greece would use British policing methods in stamping out the problem.

"Britain had a very serious hooligan situation, but this has been successfully dealt with after a series of measures were introduced," he said.

Romeos called on the Greek Football Federation to provide the Public Order Ministry with extra money to pay for more police, including riot squads, at matches.

Other measures announced include the formation of a group of supporters to help co-ordinate security matters with police and club authorities. Also, clubs are being asked to refuse ticket requests from known troublemakers.

An urgent inquiry has started following revelations that scores of criminal charges against top soccer officials were never brought to court. This follows the case of Thomas Mitropoulos, a director of Olympiakos, who was convicted in his absence and jailed for up to seven years.

Lou Economopoulos

ISRAEL

Berkovic a surprise tourist attraction

BETAR Jerusalem reached the unwanted winter break with a one-point lead over Hapoel Tel Aviv after 15 games.

Many pundits continue to question the wisdom of a five-week lay-off at a time when the climate poses no problems.

At least the soccer-starved public can keep a close watch on Israelis playing abroad. Eyal Berkovic continues to delight, and several thousand fans took cheap charter flights to London to see him in action for West Ham.

The trials of another national squad favourite, Ronnen Harazi, also attracted attention. Harazi joined Salamanca in the summer but did not play one full League game in Spain. After being turned into a virtual contractual prisoner, he finally was given permission to continue on loan with Hapoel Haifa, now third in the table.

At the bottom, Hapoel Beersheba replaced Bulgarian coach Gregori Svetkov within a week of his appointment. Eliahu Ofer is the newcomer.

Derek Fattal

TURKEY

Ilie's £4.5m move poses questions

TURKISH football has been divided by the case of Adrian Ilie, the Romanian striker who joined Galatasaray from Steaua Bucharest less than a year ago for £1.5million and has now been sold to Valencia for £4.5million.

Some claim this was good business by Gala, a flop in the Champions League and struggling for cash. Others claim that at 23, he had not fulfilled his potential.

The Big Four dominated the table as the winter break began. Fenerbahce led the way with 39 points, followed by Trabzonspor on 36, Galatasaray in third on 33 and Besiktas fourth with 30. And all four are through to the quarter-finals

Dilemma...were Gala right to sell Ilie?

of the Turkish Cup, along with Bursa, Kocaeli, Istanbulspor and Gaziantep.

Fenerbahce have been winning games under new Croatian coach Otto Baric, but making few friends. Goalkeeper Rustu has been their best player, conceding only 12 goals, the League's lowest total.

Besiktas coach John Toshack was ordered off the touchline in the 2-2 draw with Fenerbahce, after angry exchanges with the referee, who had disallowed three goals.

Toshack called opposing chairman Ali Sen a "clown" after his claims that the three offside decisions were correct, and added: "He can come to my home in Wales and I'll show him the cups and medals I've won. He can invite me to his home and show me what he's won."

Hasan Cemali

MALTA

Galea inspires coup

BIRKIRKARA ended the year as winter champions by toppling long-time leaders Sliema Wanderers from top spot.

Young Michael Galea scored the only goal of their meeting, to give Birkirkara a one-point lead. The new leaders also fielded a surprise newcomer – Joe Brincat. The international midfielder had been put up for sale by Floriana despite having been in outstanding form.

Bad news from FIFA – the official rankings show Malta in 133rd place, down 10 from last year. Even the Solomon Islands are now ranked higher.

Domenico Aquilina

CYPRUS

Omonia making up for lost time

OMONIA NICOSIA have surged to the top after making up a seven-point deficit by winning eight of their last nine outings.

Omonia have been helped by a decline in the form of Anorthosis Famagusta, who recently suffered their first home reverses since 1993, during which time illustrious clubs such as Atletico Madrid, Rangers, Lierse and Karlsruhe had been unable to beat them on their own patch.

Serbian coach Radmilo Ivancevic has been replaced at APOP by Nicos Argyroulis from Greek club Trikala.

Soulis Theodosiou

Pro-file Thomas Helveg

Dashing Dane driving Udinese's aspirations

Club Udinese
Country Denmark
Born June 24, 1971, in Odense
Previous club OB Odense
International debut February 1994 v Norway
International caps 27 (1 goal)
Honours Danish Cup 1991, 1993

THE TIME for hard decisions is looming for Danish international wing-back Thomas Helveg.

Does he remain with Serie A's most improved side, Udinese? Or should he opt for the big bucks on offer at Juventus and Milan, famous names both, but not as irresistible as they once were?

A midsummer transfer to one of Italy's soccer institutions still seems the most likely outcome. But if Helveg moves, he will do so with a sackful of warm memories.

Indeed, since signing for Udinese in 1994 from OB Odense, he has known nothing but good times: promotion to Serie A (1995), the club's first UEFA Cup qualification (1997), and a sustained run of excellent results this season – the highlight of which has been inflicting the first defeat of the domestic campaign on leaders Inter, a 1-0 home success in December.

Helveg's contribution often is overshadowed by that of Udinese's front men – Paolo Poggi, Oliver Bierhoff of Germany, and Brazilian Amoroso. But nobody could seriously deny the important part played by the Dane's grit and repeated right-flank raids.

Coach Alberto Zaccheroni, says: "Thomas has been invaluable. He is quick, has incredible stamina and work-rate, and a good tactical brain.

"He used to get into promising attacking positions and then waste the opportunity with a poor cross. But he has worked very hard on that aspect of his game, and now his final ball is usually spot on."

Helveg's development into one of Serie A's premier wing-backs has also done wonders for his international career ahead of France 98.

He has been an automatic choice for his country over the past four years and was at his dynamic best as Denmark topped their World Cup qualifying group ahead of Croatia and Greece. No wonder Danish boss Bo Johansson swears by him.

Helveg, Danish Player of the Year in 1994, says: "The style of play at Udinese is more open and adventurous than with Denmark. But my role is basically the same whoever I'm playing for.

"I must do my share of defensive duties, get forward as much as possible, and create chances. It's as simple as that.

"Outside Denmark nobody has taken much notice of our qualifying for France. That might be a good thing.

"We'll not be among the favourites, and can compete without pressure.

"I'm optimistic we can have a good tournament and we ought to progress from the first round. Under Bo Johansson, there is a relaxed and very positive spirit, and when you have world-class players like Schmeichel and the Laudrups on your side, you always have a chance."

Nick Bidwell

UKRAINE

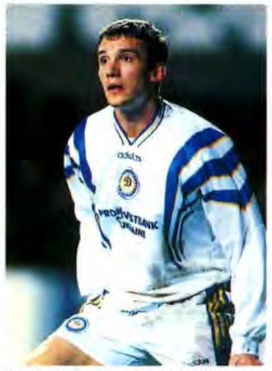
Dynamo stars in demand

KIEV DYNAMO's excellent form in the Champions League has had a predictable downside – increasing interest in their players.

Midfielder Yury Maksimov has been sold to Werder Bremen, Andrei Shevchenko, the 20-year-old international who scored five times against PSV and Barcelona, is wanted by Real Madrid and Parma, and fellow striker Sergei Rebrov is a target for Lazio.

Club president Grigory Surkis says: "This is a very difficult time for our country, with economic, political and social problems, and we like to do our best to give the people enjoyment, a bit of fresh air.

"I don't know of one club in a former Communist state that can afford to refuse the temptation of a multi-million transfer fee. But we want to create, not destroy, and we'll do all we can to keep our players here and to keep on improving."


Foreign interest...Andrei Shevchenko

Surkis is anxious to avoid the mistake made two years ago by Moscow Spartak, who sold several top players after getting through the early rounds of the Champions League and were unable to maintain their progress.

Kiev have even added to their squad in recent weeks by buying the Makovski twins, Vladimir and Mikhail, from Minsk Dynamo of Belarus, and they are discussing terms with two Russian internationals, Evgeny Kharlachev (Moscow Lokomotiv) and Alexey Gerasimenko (Rostselmash).

After 15 games, Kiev Dynamo led the table with 37 points, three ahead of Shakhtar Donetsk.

Oleg Zadernovsky

BULGARIA

Cup runs to form

THE shocks of the League, with Liteks Lovech leading the title race as the closedown approached, were not to be found in the first leg of the Cup's last 16. Levski won 4-1 away to Etar, Spartak Varna had no truck with Division Three Vihar Gorubliane, seen off 8-0, while, Lok, too, had a big win over modest Kaliakra, also of Division Three. The one capital city losers were Slavia, defeated 1-0 by Neftochimik in Burgas.

Kusdtendil and Spartak Pleven both look likely qualifiers after home wins, but the result of CSKA's tie with Botev could go either way after their goalless draw in Plovdiv.

There are signs that Cup football is being taken more seriously now that the Champions League requires qualification and UEFA chances also are more restricted until such time as Bulgaria's clubs can improve the country's UEFA co-efficient, an achievement which seems far off.

Lacking match practice...Stoichkov

On the World Cup front, concern grows not only about the age of the likely squad members, but also about how often they are going to be playing for their club sides before the tournament. Most of this concern centres on Hristo Stoichkov, since he has hardly played for Barca this season.

This may be partly compensated for, however, by his availability for training sessions if Barca coach Louis Van Gaal continues to keep him under-employed.

Bob Vaughan

POLAND

Majak makes his mark

SLAWOMIR MAJAK, who plays for Hansa Rostock in Germany, was voted Poland Footballer of the Year by the magazine *Pilka Nozna*.

Majak, a 29-year-old forward, has had an interesting if undistinguished career. He started out with amateur side Start Gidle before joining RKS Radomsko. Then he moved to First Division LKS Lodz before going to Igloopol Debica. After spending three months with Swedish Third Division side Koping, he then returned home to Zaglebie Lubin.

There followed an unlucky spell with Second Division Hannover 96 in Germany, with the side being relegated six months after his arrival.

"It was the biggest mistake of my career," Majak said. "I am so happy that Widzew bought me in 1996."

He won the Polish League title with Widzew and appeared in the Champions League for Lodz last season. He joined Hansa in the summer.

Majak made his international debut against Azerbaijan in November 1995 and now has a total of 12 caps.

Tomasz Klos was named Discovery of the Year. He is a defender but was still top scorer with eight goals for LKS Lodz in the first half of the season.

Widzew's Franciszek Smuda was voted top manager for the second time in row.

Widzew defender Tomasz Lapinski was voted Player of the Year in reader polls organised by *Sport* and *Tempo*.

International midfielder Piotr Nowak left 1860 Munich to join a new MLS team, Chicago Fire. The biggest Polish community in the USA (around one million) live in Chicago.

Dariusz Kurowski

CZECH REPUBLIC

Uhrin departs, Chovanec arrives

RUMOURS following the national side's Confederations Cup campaign and the steep decline in the team's form suggested that national coach Dusan Uhrin's days were numbered. So it proved when he accepted an offer to coach club side Al Nasr of Dubai.

Uhrin was elected Coach of the Year after getting the Republic to the final of Euro 96, an achievement hardly anyone could have prophesied when the competition began in autumn 1994.

His replacement is Jozef Chovanec, who coached Sparta to the top of the table this season.

When football restarts after the winter break, Slavia alone will be flying the European flag, in the Cup-winners Cup, but without much chance of reaching the semi-finals – though that is what everyone said when they had to go to Rome two seasons ago!

Further progress would be welcome given that the championship is almost in Sparta's pocket, the World Cup campaign is over and attendances are slipping. Except, of course, in Brno.

Bob Vaughan

ROMANIA

Iordanescu seeks support

STEAUA's dismissal from the UEFA Cup at Villa Park and failure to reach the quarter-finals came as a blow after the promise of the first leg in Bucharest, where the thickness of a crossbar denied the Stars a 3-0 lead.

Eventual collapse in Birmingham means the end of European dreams for Romanian teams for another season, and no international club football for fans this spring.

The World Cup is fortunately another matter, but when will national coach Anghel Iordanescu be able to gather his far-flung flock for a training session? The answer looks likely to be only just before the finals.

World Cup hopes are unlikely to be furthered by a reserve squad going for another King's Cup in Thailand, though even that competition has been something of a preoccupation for Iordanescu.

The position on preparatory games is not clear, though presumably there will be a match in Bucharest before departure for France.

The federation and Iordanescu do not always see eye to eye but some fixtures are required, and Romania are not the only European country looking for suitable opposition.

Out of contention...Florin Raducioiu

Two veterans of previous World Cup campaigns – Florin Raducioiu and Ioan Lupescu – have said that they no longer wish to be considered for the national team.

Raducioiu was not called on by the national coach last season in any case, though Lupescu, only 30 next December, might have been a possible on the substitutes' bench.

Bob Vaughan

SLOVAKIA

Coaching in question

THE future leadership of the national team is the mid-winter topic for debate, the position being complicated by forthcoming elections at the FA.

National coach Jozef Jankech's contract was up on the last day of 1997 and generally he is felt to have done a good job in a difficult World Cup group, where the Czechs were also-rans, too.

Now the question is whether he goes on for two seasons, up to the end of the Euro 2000 campaign. His assistant and Under-21 coach, Milan Lesicky, has indicated that he will not under any circumstances continue. The likelihood is that he will return to club football.

Karol Pecze is not a possible successor to Jankech; he has his hands full restoring the morale of his Kosice team after their failure to secure even one point in their Champions League group, and the dreadful accident which took the life of midfielder Milan Cvirk.

Albert Rusnak, the other player in the car when they crashed at high speed on the outskirts of Kosice, is seriously injured and may never play again.

Pecze's task in trying to overhaul the leaders at halfway, Spartak Trnava, will be far from easy when the League gets going again in the first week of March.

By then the national situation should have been resolved, much depending on whether Jozef Venglos stands for FA president.

Bob Vaughan

HUNGARY

Goodbye to an awful year

SOME luck is badly needed to stop Ferenc Puskas crying into his goulash. The trouncings by Yugoslavia are difficult to forget and they helped to make last year probably the worst for the game in Hungary in its century of history.

A friendly has been agreed with the Austrians as part of their warm-up for the World Cup.

As the winter shut-down approached, MTK were suggesting they may regain the title, although Gyor may be difficult to knock off the top.

Honved have a relegation battle to fight, but hopefully the ignominy of Second Division soccer at the Jozsef Bozsik Stadium can be avoided.

Bob Vaughan

RUSSIA

Ignatiev stays put

THE Russian Football Union decided not to fire national coach Boris Ignatiev, who has a contract until August, despite his squad's failure to qualify for France 98.

RFU president Vyagheslav Koloskov admitted it was a mistake to put Ignatiev on a contract that ran until after the World Cup finals. "A contract until the end of the qualification round would have been more appropriate," he said, "but we were so sure that the team would qualify from their group."

Victor Gusev

Staying put...Boris Ignatiev

ALBANIA

Starova's switch

SULEJMAN STAROVA, coach of Partizan Tirani, has been elected general secretary of the Albanian Football Federation.

His first move was to arrange for extra police to be present at League matches because of the continuing violence.

Starova's last game in charge of Partizan was held up for nine minutes by Tomorri supporters claiming that a goal should have been disallowed. A linesman was hit by one of many objects thrown.

"We were under stress but managed to finish the match," said Starova. "I feel that the championship should continue with matches in neutral stadiums."

This happened last season, after the outbreak of civil unrest had led to the championship's suspension. Final play-off games were arranged, on neutral grounds, and three home World Cup qualifiers were played abroad.

Clubs were allowed to return to their own grounds this season, but there has been one violent incident after another.

Gezim Nushi

GEORGIA

Gutsaev takes over

THE Georgian national team are under new control. Vladimir Gutsaev, 75 years old, was appointed coach on Christmas Day.

Gutsaev was one of the best forwards in Tbilisi Dynamo history, and has held various coaching posts since he retired from playing.

"Georgians have good technique, but they must train harder to achieve greater physical powers," he said.

The first half of the season ended with Tbilisi Dynamo six points clear and favourites for the championship, despite a defeat by second-placed Dynamo Batumi in the last round before the break.

This was a fine performance by Batumi, who have sold three players – Mudjiri, Ukmajuridze and Tugushi – to clubs in Israel.

BELARUS

Dynamo's title again

PLAYED 30, won 21, drawn seven, 74 goals scored and only 24 conceded. That's the record achieved by Minsk Dynamo, who regained the championship despite losing two of their first three games. After that they went 27 matches undefeated, to finish four points ahead of Belshina Bobruisk.

A change of manager certainly paid off for Dynamo, with Anatoly Baidachny replacing Ivan Shchekin in fine style.

Dynamo won the first five Belarusan titles, but surprisingly lost it last season to MPKC Mozyr.

Belshina, coached by a former Minsk Dynamo player, Oleg Volokh, took 41 points in the first half but only 27 in the second, and lost impetus after only drawing with lowly Molodechno.

One curiosity about football in Belarus is that people can control more than one club. Yevgenyi Khvastovich, for example, controls three, all in Minsk – the champions, Ataka and Molodechno.

Belshina had some slight consolation when Andrei Khlebosolov ended as the League's top scorer for the second successive season. He scored 19 goals, compared with 34 last time.

Vladimir Makovski of Dynamo was second with 16, but as the season ended he and his twin, Mikhail, were sold to Kiev Dynamo.

Vladimir Kalinkovich

MACEDONIA

National coach seeks revenge

NATIONAL coach Gjoko Hadzievski remains optimistic despite the disappointments of the World Cup qualifying tournament.

Looking forward to the Euro 2000 draw, he said: "I would like to be in a group of six, including two of the favourites, such as Germany and England, and especially Lithuania."

Hadzievski is desperate to get revenge for the two defeats by the Lithuanians in the World Cup group. He certainly faces a tough job, with his team having dropped to 92nd in the FIFA rankings.

Nor has he been helped by the late cancellations of friendlies against Poland and Bulgaria. The young squad need all the experience they can get.

The season restarts on March 1 with the League seeing many new faces, including a Nigerian, seven Brazilians and three Cameroonians.

Michael Stojmanovski

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South'ton v. United FAC '76
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Leeds v. Arsenal FAC '72
Stoke v. Chelsea LC '72
Hearts 0 **HIBS 7**
NEW! Celtic 1 **Partick 4** SLCF '71
Arsenal v. Liverpool DOUBLE '71
NEW! **Cardiff** v. Real Madrid '70
NEW! **Colchester** v. Leeds FAC
Swindon v. Arsenal LC '69
NEW! **United** v. Benfica '68
NEW! Newcastle 3 **City 4** Champs '68
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England 2 **Scotland 3** '67
Q.P.R. v. W.B.A. LC '67
England v. W. Germany '66
Charlton 7 Huddersfield 6 '57
Blackpool v. Bolton FAC '53
NEW! **Cardiff** v. Arsenal FAC '27

Super Cup's future in doubt

Eric Weil reports on the threat to the Libertadores Cup-winners cup

THE Super Cup, the tournament restricted to winners of the Libertadores Cup, may not be contested again. River Plate won the 1997 version, the sixth victory for an Argentinian team in the event's 10 years, but new competitions are now threatening its future.

Clubs from both Brazil and Argentina have signalled their intention not to take part this year, in order to play in the new and more lucrative Mercosur Cup.

The position is not clear, because three Argentinian Libertadores winners and one Brazilian will not compete in the Mercosur Cup either, nor another new event, the Merconorte Cup, to be played at around the same time.

The South American Football Confederation intends to continue with the Super Cup, even though the only winners of the Libertadores would come from Uruguay (two) and Paraguay, Chile and Colombia (one each).

The 1997 event was not of a very high standard, which was perhaps to be expected because some Libertadores winners go back to 1960, when that tournament began, and are not now among the best.

The Final, however, consisted of two exciting games which produced a lot of good soccer. River Plate defeated Sao Paulo (0-0, 2-1) and so won the event for the first time.

The format had been changed this time around, with the teams divided into four groups to determine the qualifiers for the semi-finals instead of being run on a two-leg knockout basis as in previous years.

Argentinian clubs in general showed little interest, and three – Velez Sarsfield, Boca Juniors and Racing – finished bottom of their respective groups, as did Brazil's Gremio. Boca even fielded a reserve team for one match when they still had a chance of avoiding bottom place, and bankrupt Racing Club wanted to withdraw and took part only after the FA gave them a loan. Independiente and Estudiantes avoided bottom place only because they finished ahead of another Argentinian club, and Argentinos Juniors were not allowed to take part, despite having won the Libertadores, because last season they had been in the Second Division.

The semi-final between Vasco da Gama and River Plate in Rio was suspended when fans threw objects, an incident that led to an 18-month ban on the stadium's use for South American international games.

There is no talk of the CONMEBOL Cup – the equivalent of the UEFA Cup – being discontinued, but there is little interest in it, especially among spectators.

This season, defending champions Lanus of Argentina, who had never won a title before, reached the Final again, but lost to Brazil's Atletico Mineiro.

The first leg, in Buenos Aires, was suspended with Mineiro leading 4-1, amid some of the worst scenes in my experience. A fight started between players – the now-retired Oscar Ruggeri of Lanus seemed to be the instigator – and carried on to the reserve benches, where Mineiro coach Emerson Leao, the former Brazil goalkeeper, had his jaw broken. There was also widespread fighting between fans.

Ruggeri was banned for 10 games and five other Lanus players for six each. As a result, the club had to send what was virtually a reserve squad to Belo Horizonte for the second leg, which ended 1-1. But the first leg's scoreline had been allowed to stand, so Lanus lost 5-2 on aggregate. Further bad news for the Argentinian club was that their stadium has been closed to South American internationals for 10 games.

ARGENTINA

River Plate take three in a row

RIVER PLATE won the 1997-98 season's national opening title by a point from Boca Juniors in one of the most exciting finishes of recent years.

This was River's third championship in a row, because they won last season's opening and closing tournaments, and took their total to 26 since the start of professional soccer in Argentina in 1931. Boca are second on the list, with 15.

There had been three previous trebles in pro soccer. Racing Club won in 1949-50-51 and River Plate did so in 1955-56-57, when only one championship was played each season; in 1980 River won the First Division and the National title (now combined) and in the following year topped the First Division again.

This time the final weeks were overshadowed by accusations that certain clubs had paid another club's rivals a bonus to win, an act prohibited under FA rules but impossible to prove.

On the last day, a tired River Plate, who had won the Super Cup four days earlier, hung on to draw 1-1 with Argentinos Juniors, while Boca, playing perhaps their best match of the tournament, beat Union 4-0 to close to within a point. River finished with a 14-3-2 record, Boca with 13-5-1.

The single point victory did not do River justice, however. They showed much better teamwork, confidence and strength in depth, as well as individual ability, and team changes did not affect their rhythm. Boca lacked co-ordination in attack, and although they have a strong playing staff, from which they can field virtually two first teams, they still have not found the right blend.

While Uruguay struggled for goals in their World Cup qualifying campaign, a Uruguayan was top scorer in the League for the second time in a row. Ruben Da Silva, now playing for Rosario Central after spells with both River and Boca, scored 15 goals. His compatriot Sergio Martinez, recently sold by Boca to La Coruna in Spain, had topped the scorers in the previous tournament.

Third-placed Rosario Central look good for the closing championship, although they could do with more reserve strength. They could yet be caught by San Lorenzo, whose final match, with Huracan, had to be suspended after 20 minutes, at 0-0, due to crowd trouble.

This was the epilogue to a violent championship, with police admitting that they are sometimes powerless to control the clashes between fans, especially when sudden outbreaks are not caused by incidents during the match.

That was the case when a fight before the game resulted in a Huracan supporter's death – the fourth fan killed in 1997. When the news spread, supporters already in the ground broke through the perimeter fencing on to the pitch.

On the following day, a smoke bomb thrown during River Plate's game caused a photographer to lose an eye.

As the championship came to an end, government, clubs and police were again discussing how to stop the violence in the game, but so far they have been incapable of taking any practical steps.

Colon Santa Fe beat Independiente 1-0 in the match between the runners-up in last season's two championships, to decide which club will accompany River Plate into the next Libertadores Cup.

Eric Weil

Winning performance...River Plate's Marcelo Salas celebrates Super Cup victory

BRAZIL

Clearly the best...Edmundo

Thanks, Edmundo

Record scorer rescues a dire competition

THE BRAZILIAN championship got the Final it deserved when Vasco da Gama and Palmeiras played out two truly dire 0-0 draws. Vasco won the title by having the better overall record, but it was a melancholic way to end a championship which started and finished amid the usual chaos.

The competition got off on the wrong foot when Fluminense, Bragantino and Atletico Paranaense were allowed to take part, even though the first two had been relegated last year and Atletico had been suspended after a match-fixing scandal. It ended in a similar rule-bending manner when Edmundo, the best player in the country, was allowed to play in the second leg of the Final even though he should have been serving a suspension.

Also typical of the Brazilian game, the Final was played on the day when the national team were involved in the decisive match of the Confederations Cup in Saudi Arabia.

Vasco and Palmeiras reached the Final after winning the two four-team semi-final groups. Edmundo, scorer of a record-breaking 29 goals in the championship, began the first leg on two yellow cards and the big question had been whether he could avoid another booking, which would mean automatic suspension from the second leg.

The answer came five minutes after the break when Edmundo threw the ball at Roque Junior. It seemed harmless compared with some of the kicking he had received in the first half, but the referee got out his yellow card.

The real twist came 10 minutes from time, when Edmundo lashed out at Cleber and was sent off. After the game, it transpired that Edmundo could actually benefit from receiving the red card. While three yellow cards carry an automatic ban, a single red, which overruled the third yellow, does not.

The CBF's disciplinary tribunal met the day before the second leg and decided to let him off with a fine. The curious side to all this was that nobody, apart from Vasco's lawyers, seemed aware of the loophole: all the players previously sent off had served suspensions of at least one match without waiting for the tribunal to meet.

Palmeiras were rightly indignant to start with, until they were reminded that Edmundo had played for them in the 1994 Final and had been suspended on that occasion as well.

After all the fuss, Vasco did not really need Edmundo in the second leg. Despite playing at home with the backing of an 89,000 crowd, Vasco manager Antonio Lopes decided to go for the 0-0 draw.

The best goal effort came from Edmundo when he thumped a free-kick against the bar in the first half, while Vasco goalkeeper Carlos Germano made two top-class saves in the closing stages, the only time the game ever caught fire.

The second match was still an improvement on the first, which was interrupted by 65 fouls, 40 by Palmeiras. Team manager Luiz Felipe Scolari also oversaw the Gremio thuggery, when they hacked their way to take the Libertadores Cup in 1995 and the Brazilian championship last year.

The highlight of the competition was Vasco's 4-1 destruction of Flamengo in the semi-finals, despite playing much of the game with 10 men. Edmundo scored a hat-trick, including two gems: his third goal broke Reinaldo's 19-year-old championship record tally of 28 goals.

Overall, Vasco deserved their triumph. They played the best football, scoring 69 goals, and in Edmundo, who hit six in a single game against Uniao Sao Joao, they clearly had the best player. We were certainly grateful to him for giving us a break from the incessant Ronaldo-mania.

Flamengo did well to reach the semi-finals with a youthful squad while Portuguesa nearly repeated last year's performance, when they surprisingly reached the Final.

The Vasco-Flamengo game was seen by one of the few full houses in the competition. Attendances averaged a pitiful 9,000, but despite this the CBF tried to pretend it was in charge of a big competition by implementing a rule that semi-finals could be played only in stadia with a 40,000-plus capacity.

This deprived Juventude, Portuguesa, Vasco and Santos of the right to play at home, the former being forced to move to Porto Alegre, 120 kilometres away. It also looked pretty stupid when only 55 fans watched their last game.

Brian Homewood

IN BRIEF

Four die after title decider

CELEBRATIONS in the **COLOMBIAN** city of Cali following America's title decider win resulted in four deaths and 82 injuries, mostly caused by traffic accidents and drunkenness.

America ended a five-year wait for the title, which they had won eight times before, by beating Bucuramanga 1-0 and 2-0 in the play-off between the opening and closing championship winners.

Both teams will go into the next Libertadores Cup.

In **URUGUAY**, champions Penarol won the end-of-season tournament to become one of the two Libertadores representatives.

The six top points scorers and the two best provincial clubs played in two groups, topped by Penarol and Nacional. They then met in the Final, when Penarol's 3-1 victory completed a run of 13 unbeaten matches.

In **CHILE**, Colo Colo won the closing championship and go into the Libertadores Cup with Universidad Catolica, the opening winners. This was the first time the championship had been split into two.

Marcelo Salas was chosen as Chile's Player of the Year, despite playing for River Plate in Argentina.

In **PARAGUAY**, Olimpia beat Cerro Cora 3-0 to take the closing championship, then defeated the opening winners, Cerro Porteno, 1-0 and 1-1 in the play-off for the overall title.

The two winners both qualify for the Libertadores Cup, although earlier in the season the FA had banned Olimpia from taking part in it, because they had appeared in an unofficial tournament.

In **BOLIVIA**, Bolivar retained their title by winning the six-team final round by a massive seven points ahead of Oriente Petrolero. Both go into the Libertadores Cup.

In **PERU**, Sporting Cristal qualified for the Libertadores for the fourth time in a row after topping the six-team final tournament. The championship was won by Alianza Lima, who also go into the Libertadores Cup.

MEN IN THE NEWS

Pele one up at half-time

PELE, now Brazil's Sports Minister, is halfway towards getting his controversial proposal for Brazil's soccer future on to the statute book. The lower house of the Brazilian Parliament has approved his plan that will allow clubs to arrange their own tournaments – in direct opposition to the FA – and for players to become free agents after two years instead of the current 10.

The bill, which has yet to be passed by the upper house, has been strongly criticised by the FA and by FIFA president Joao Havelange. He says that Brazil could be banished from FIFA, and so from the World Cup, if Pele's plans become law.

Yes, minister...Pele

MILTON MELGAR, 37-year-old Bolivian international midfielder, has retired. 'Maravilla' began with Blooming 19 years ago and rejoined the club last season.

SERGIO MARTINEZ, Uruguayan international striker, has moved from Boca Juniors (Arg) to Deportivo La Coruna (Spa) for £2.2million.

WILSON PEREZ, the Colombian international defender, has been sentenced to 50 months in jail for drug-trafficking.

A sample with a difference

MAURICIO LOPEZ gave a urine sample with a difference after a game for Argentinian side Quilmes. It contained beer – and nothing but. Unable to urinate when randomly selected for a drugs test, Lopez filled the sample bottle with some of the contents from a bottle of beer.

When the disciplinary committee stopped laughing they gave him only a one-match suspension. With such leniency they are likely to find more beer-laced samples in future.

● CESAR MENOTTI, coach of Argentina when they won the 1978 World Cup, has returned to the country after a short spell in Italy with Sampdoria, and is to take over at Independiente. He left them three games before the end of the 1996-97

CONCACAF

How to win without being a member

Paul Gardner previews the Gold Cup

IF YOU still think football tournaments are all about football, a look at the Concacaf Gold Cup should tell you that's only a half-truth these days.

To start with, the tournament is, rather oddly, being split between Miami and Los Angeles. Why? Television. Specifically, Brazilian television. If all the games are played in California, then the evening games come on far too late in Brazil (which is six hours ahead of West Coast time). So a couple of 7.30 evening games are scheduled for Brazil in Miami, where the time difference is only three hours.

Anyway, what has Brazil to do with Concacaf, which is the North and Central American and Caribbean region of FIFA? Quite simply, they were invited to play.

It makes for a more intriguing tournament and it's not a bad way for Brazil to warm up for the World Cup. Except that virtually all the top Brazilian players are with European clubs, who are not happy about the number of calls being made on those players.

Coach Mario Zagallo will almost certainly not press the point – partly because he will need the clubs' co-operation for releases nearer to World Cup time, and partly because there are still some new players to be looked at.

Nobody is in any doubt that, as Concacaf general secretary Chuck Blazer put it, "I expect Brazil to send a pretty strong team." Which poses another question: what happens if Brazil win? Who would then be the Concacaf representative at the next Confederations Cup? The losing finalist? That might be unfair to the team Brazil had beaten in the semi-final. So, if the beaten semi-finalists win the third-place game, they would play off against the losing finalists to decide the Concacaf champions. If they lose the third-place game, the beaten finalists would be the champions.

Then there is a political angle – the USA can't seem to keep clear of provocative opponents. The World Cup draw has put them in the same group as Iran. And the Gold Cup has them playing Cuba on the tournament's opening day.

At a personal level, there is the poignant case of Manuel Lapuente, recently installed as the new coach of Mexico after the firing of Bora Milutinovic. Except that Lapuente is not new, he has coached Mexico before – at the first Gold Cup in 1991. That was when Mexico went down 2-0 to eventual winners USA and the humiliated Lapuente resigned on the spot.

There is more organisational sophistication to report. The problem of Canada, who qualified, and Jamaica, who did not. Since then Canada – playing very badly – failed to qualify for France 98, while Jamaica – playing surprisingly well – did. An agreement was reached, for the good of the Gold Cup. After Canadian coach Bob Lenarduzzi resigned, the Canadian FA withdrew their team from the Gold Cup, and Concacaf delightedly moved Jamaica into the vacated berth.

But when all the off-the-field manoeuvring is over, it will surely be size that matters in this tournament, where £300,000 is at stake. The struggle for the £90,000 first prize will be settled among the three major countries involved: Brazil, Mexico and the USA.

● *For the Gold Cup schedule, see World Service, starting page 47.*

Colin Jose writes: With no national league in Canada and none in sight, a short season, declining spectator interest, teams spread over 3,000 miles and limited finance, whoever takes over as national team coach from Bob Lenarduzzi will face a decidedly uphill battle.

Lenarduzzi, who resigned shortly after Canada's elimination from the World Cup, was appointed in 1992 and finished with a record of 25 wins, 22 draws and 36 defeats. He was Canada's second native-born coach after Don Petrie in 1957. Between these two, the national team had largely had British-born coaches and there is a feeling among fans that Canada need a coach with international experience and a non-British background.

MEXICO

Injured Hermosillo settles title

ONE of Mexico's favourite players, Carlos Hermosillo, won the Winter League for Cruz Azul with a golden goal – when he should not have been on the field.

Cruz Azul had won the first leg of the play-off Final 1-0 against Leon, but trailed by the same score after 90 minutes in the return. Hermosillo, one of the substitutes despite having two broken ribs, went on, and in the 101st minute he was pushed over by goalkeeper Angel David Comizzo, who then kicked him.

The referee awarded a penalty for the push, but had not seen Comizzo's kick and allowed him to stay on. He also did not order Hermosillo to go off for treatment, even though he was bleeding from a cut and should have left the field. Hermosillo then scored from the spot to give Cruz Azul their first title for 17 years.

The 1998 Summer League started in January with only four non-Mexican coaches in the top division. They are Argentinian Eduardo Solari at Morella and three Uruguayans, Juan Ahuntchain (Atletico Celaya), Anibal Ruiz (Leon) and Julio Cesar Gonzalez (Puebla).

Carlos Ramirez

ASIA

JAPAN

Jubilo trim Antlers

THE 1997 Japanese season finished with a tremendous upset, when Jubilo Iwata came back after suffering a disastrous defeat in the League Cup Final to beat Kashima Antlers at home and away to secure the J.League title.

The clubs met four times on consecutive weekends in the two competitions, and with Antlers winning 2-1 away and 5-1 at home in the League Cup, Jubilo looked to have nothing left to offer.

Spirited performance...Masashi Nakayama's goals helped Jubilo beat Antlers

Captain Dunga's call to international duty with Brazil cannot have done much for their confidence, but it did quite a bit for their motivation.

"They probably wanted to show that they can manage without Dunga," said caretaker manager Takashi Kuwabara. Talented youngsters such as Daisuke Oku, Norihisa Shimizu and Takahiro Yamanishi took the opportunity to play with the creativity they hardly dare attempt when Dunga is present – for fear of being bawled out – and were more of a team as a result.

Kuwabara also deserves credit for switching to a bright attacking formation, from the defensive midfield line-up he sent out in the 5-1 defeat.

Masashi Nakayama, back from his successful recall to the national squad, was just the man to revive spirits. He set the tone with a goal in the first minute of the home leg, then added a second just after the interval, and Jubilo hung on to win 3-2 in extra-time.

Wages soar as gates slide

THE J.LEAGUE is now facing the downside of being Asia's most glamorous soccer organisation. The wage-bargaining season is again in full flood and the financial pressures are stronger than ever on account of falling attendances. The 1997 average at J.League games was 10,131, almost half the 19,598 of 1994.

Several clubs are in trouble, and there was even a collection box for Shimizu S-Pulse at the official entrance to the Yamazaki Nabisco Cup Final.

S-Pulse have been saved by a new sponsor, but several others, including twice champions Verdy Kawasaki, are planning to slash wage bills.

Sanfrecce Hiroshima are expected to shed nearly all their Japanese stars, including international striker Takuya Takagi.

The League chairman, Saburo Kawabuchi, is taking a firm line, saying that clubs must get their houses in order and that sound management practices will be imposed on those who do not.

The League will be looking very closely at the finances of every club, and those not meeting standards are likely to be excluded from the new top division when the J.League switches to a two-tier format in 1999.

● DUNGA, of Jubilo Iwata, was named J.League Player of the Year for 1997. Atsushi Yanagisawa of Kashima Antlers was Best New Player of the Year, and Vissel Kobe won the Fair Play trophy.

● VISSEL KOBE have signed former Real Madrid coach Benito Floro and a leading South Korean, international striker Kim Do Hoon, from Chunbuk Dinos.

Mike Plastow & Michi Ishijima

ASIA IN BRIEF

Club 1, FA 0

AL NASR of DUBAI caused a sensation by signing a coach who was wanted to manage the United Arab Emirates, Dubai's own national team.

The United Arab Emirates FA had hoped to recruit Dusan Uhrin, former coach of the Czech Republic, to fill the vacancy left when Brazilian Lori Sandri resigned after the unsuccessful World Cup qualifying campaign.

Another Czech, Milan Macala, now in charge of Kuwait, was loaned to the UAE for the recent Confederations Cup in Saudi Arabia, where the Czechs also competed. Discussions took place between Uhrin and the UAE's FA, but he decided to accept the Al Nasr offer.

In IRAQ, three clubs had 29 points after 12 games. Al Shourta were top after drawing 1-1 with fourth-placed Al Talaba in Baghdad, defending champions Al Zawra were second, and Al Najak third.

In PALESTINE, Rafah SFC – a club based in the Gaza Strip – won the FA Cup for the first time, beating Shabab Al-Birah of the West Bank 3-2.

In OMAN, Al Nasr opened up a seven-point gap by winning six games in a row.

Mohamed Chbaro

IN INDIA, Cochin, who entered the National Premier League in odd circumstances, won their first two matches as the second season of semi-professional soccer got under way.

It was thought that the top division would continue to comprise eight teams, but shortly before the season started the IFA decided to increase it to 10, and invited Cochin and Mohun Bagan to join.

Cochin began by beating East Bengal 2-1 at home, then won 4-0 away to India Bank, in a match shifted from Madras to Trichur because of heavy rain.

Bhasi Malaparamba

IN CHINA, the FA have changed the transfer rules, with a view to keeping top players in the country.

Now nobody under 26 years of age can change clubs; nobody under 28 can be transferred overseas; the CFA will decide which club a player can join, and if he does not agree then he must remain where he is; and if two or more clubs want a player, he must go to the one highest in the League table.

The controversial spring training session in Kunming, where players from the country's top 24 clubs face intense physical demands, may be cancelled, because many of the clubs prefer to go overseas. A decision has not yet been made, but the CFA has at least dropped the ruling that forced players to run 10,000 metres every day during the training period, which lasts for a month.

Play restarted after the three-month break with Dalian taking their run of unbeaten League games past 50. With five fixtures left they are certain to win their third title in a row.

Zheng Ming

SOUTH KOREA

KIM JOO SUNG of Pusan Daewoo has been given the Most Valuable Player award by the Korea Professional League – 10 years after winning Rookie of the Year.

Kim, originally a forward and a frequent member of the international team, has been playing in defence in recent seasons.

The 1997 Rookie award went to Shin Jim Won of Taejon Citizens.

Nike will sponsor the Korean national team for another five years, in a deal worth about £20million.

AFRICA

SOUTHERN AFRICA

Right title for champions

POWER DYNAMOS of Kitwe lived up to their name by winning the championship in ZAMBIA, finishing in impressive style with a 7-0 pounding of Indeni. Nkane, another Kitwe outfit, were second, two points behind.

Preparations for the Nations Cup began with a 2-0 win over the hosts, Burkina Faso, in Lusaka. Both goals came from Silvester Musonda, making his debut.

Zambia's Under-20 team retained the COSAFA championship with a 2-0 victory over Zimbabwe.

Former Zambian international Jones Chilengi has been named Coach of the Year in ZIMBABWE, and Walter Tshuma is Footballer of the Year.

SWAZILAND held Mozambique to a 1-1 draw in Somholo.

WEST AFRICA

SHAMO QUAYE, who helped GHANA to the bronze medal at the 1992 Olympics, has died at his home in Tema while on holiday from his Swedish club, Umea.

He was hit in the face by a ball when having a kickabout and was taken to hospital, but died on the way.

MALI won the Amilcar Cabral Cup in Gambia, beating Senegal 1-0 in the Final. Guinea beat Gambia on penalties to take third place.

TOGO's new national coach is Eberhard Vogel, who was formerly in charge of East Germany and Borussia Monchengladbach.

NORTH AFRICA

ZAMALEK of EGYPT took the annual Afro-Asian Cup by beating Pohang Steelers of South Korea on away goals. They won 1-0 at home after losing 2-1 in the first leg. But Zamalek continue to struggle at home and are four points behind Al Ahli and Ismaili.

Al Ahli have fired their German coach, Rainer Hollman, after losing to Tunisia's Club Africain in the Arab Champions Cup Final. His assistant, Ahmed Maher, took over for the derby against Zamalek, which ended 0-0.

A 21-man ALGERIAN squad will take part in three matches – two with Egypt and one with Togo – during the Nations Cup build-up.

EAST AFRICA

FANS of AFC Leopards in KENYA confronted players and officials in protest at poor results and the sale of some key men.

Leopards and new champions Umtali will represent Kenya at the East and Central African club championship in Zanzibar.

Mark Gleeson

OCEANIA

Roos in the money

WHAT'S THAT about dark clouds and silver linings? Although the Australian soccer fraternity is only now coming to terms with their team's shock World Cup elimination by Iran, Soccer Australia made nearly £900,000 profit from the World Cup campaign.

Receipts from the Confederations Cup in Riyadh will have further swelled SA's coffers.

Every penny will be required, though, if Australian soccer is to maintain the impetus it has enjoyed over recent years. A fully professional national league is urgently needed, as is an annual state-of-origin tournament featuring overseas-based professionals.

These require money, as does the retention of Terry Venables as national coach. Since his appointment, the sport has had an unprecedentedly high profile and, for that reason alone, Australian officials will be eager to find the £200,000 a year his contract is believed to guarantee him.

Venables has stated his intention to remain in charge and this, plus the youth of many key Socceroos and the public's unparalleled interest in their national side, give a solid base for optimism.

Should Soccer Australia maintain their focus, Australian soccer should maintain its momentum. Even so, the 2002 World Cup seems an awfully long time away.

● SYDNEY UNITED continue to set the pace in the Ericsson Cup, and have a three-point advantage over Carlton Blues and Perth Glory. Although Glory have home attendances three times the average, and their team includes former Nigerian World Cup star Samson Siasia, the greatest threat to United's prolonged supremacy may well come from Adelaide City, who are seven points behind but have three games in hand.

Staying put...Terry Venables, with Socceroo Harry Kewell

Halford makes a difference

ONE MAN has made a huge difference to Napier City Rovers, who hammered Woolston WMC 8-1 and reached the New Zealand National League's mid-season break unbeaten.

Napier were defeated in both the League Grand Final and Chatham Cup Final during the 1996-97 season but now look a more polished outfit. That is largely due to the return, after a two-year retirement, of diminutive linkman Paul Halford, once of Derby County.

The team are eight points ahead of Nelson Suburbs, whose fortunes have improved of late thanks to the return of influential Solomon Islands international Batram Suri. He has made a full recovery from the knee injury which had dogged him for some time.

Third-placed Miramar Rangers lie three points behind Nelson Suburbs.

Paul Moon

Crossword

Win exclusive *UHLSPORT* sportswear!

Uhlsport have kindly donated another fantastic first prize for this month's crossword. The first correct entry selected at random after February 1, will win exclusive Uhlsport sportswear. Five runners-up will each win an exclusive *WORLD SOCCER* sweatshirt.
SEND YOUR ENTRY TO: **FEBRUARY CROSSWORD, *WORLD SOCCER*, King's Reach Tower, Stamford St, London SE1 9LS.**

CLUES ACROSS

7 .....Nicosia club which represented Cyprus in this season's Cup-winners Cup (5)
8 .....Home base of newly-admitted US MLS team, Fusion (5)
9 .....Feyenoord midfielder recruited from Twente last year (7)
10 .....Cameroon midfield man in France with RC Lens (3)
11 .....FC Porto's Brazilian defender who previously turned out for Belenenses (4)
13 .....Defender from Paraguay transferred in 1997 from Gremio to Benfica (4)
17 .....Very promising young striker of Lyon and Cameroon (3)
18 .....S. African keeper in the African Nations Cup Final side of 1996 (7)
20 .....Atletico Madrid central defender once Spain's Under-21 captain (5)
21 .....French club from the Grimonprez-Jooris Stadium (5)

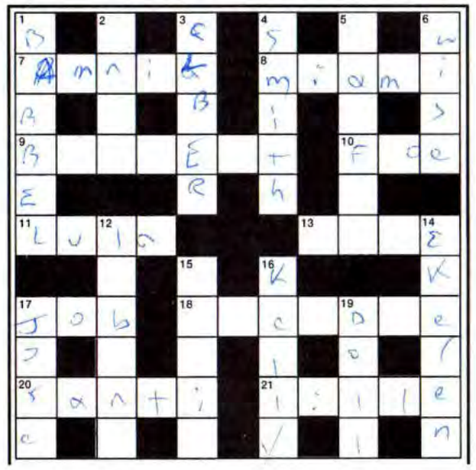
CLUES DOWN

1 .....One-time Hamburg defender of Bayern and Germany (6)
2 .....1987 Norwegian champions from the Mellos Stadium (4)
3 .....Brazilian striker in Germany with Stuttgart and Bayern Munich (5)
4 .....Coach completing his successful stint with Glasgow Rangers (5)
5 .....Egyptian national coach who gave way to Al-Gohari last April (6)
6 .....Ex-England midfielder skippering Ruud Gullit's Chelsea (4)
12 .....Rapid Bucharest goalkeeper recently elevated to Romania's national squad (6)
14 .....Belgium's Cup-winners Cup representatives, 1997-98 (6)
15 .....Red Star Belgrade defender lured by Lecce to Serie A (5)
16 .....Wing-back of Leeds United and the Republic of Ireland (5)
17 .....Benfica boss whose dismissal made room for Graeme Souness (4)
19 .....Bari's German midfield stalwart formerly at Lazio (4)

Apologies for the non-appearance of the Crossword last month. This was due to circumstances beyond our control.

DECEMBER WINNERS

First Prize: Colin Maclean, Isle of Lewis, Scotland.
Five runners-up: F. Di Lorenzo, London, Steve Perry, Derby, John Hinshaw, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, David Sauce Martin, Madrid, Spain, Jean-Paul Camille, Seychelles.



NAME

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Diary Nov/Dec 1997

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 21

AUSTRIA: Peter Stoger, sacked by Rapid Vienna, joins LASK Linz.
FRANCE: Turf experts admit concerns about the state of the pitch at the Stade de France in Paris, less than two months before the inaugural match there.
JAMAICA: The federation dismisses as 'rubbish' reports that El Salvador took a bribe to fix their World Cup qualifier.
PORTUGAL: Sporting forward Paulo Alves joins West Ham on loan.
SCOTLAND: Aberdeen appoint Alex Miller, assistant to Scotland's national coach Craig Brown, as manager.
SPAIN: Real Sociedad's Austria mid-fielder Dietmar Kuehbauer reveals he had several times considered suicide since the death of his wife earlier this year... Barcelona coach Louis Van Gaal flies home to Holland after his mother's death.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 22

ACTION: Iran and Australia draw 1-1 in their World Cup play-off opener in Tehran ...Brazilian Andre Cruz converts a penalty 11 minutes from time to earn Milan a 2-2 draw against city rivals Inter.
EL SALVADOR: Senior police sources deny having made inquiries into match-fixing allegations concerning the El Salvador v Jamaica World Cup qualifier.
RUSSIA: Sports Minister Leonid Tyagachev says national coach Boris Ignatiev should consider resignation after Russia failed to qualify for France 98.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23

ACTION: In Holland, Feyenoord record their first win under new coach Leo Beenhakker by beating Utrecht 3-1.
AUSTRIA: The governments of Austria and Hungary sign a declaration guaran-teeing their support for a joint bid to host the 2004 European Championship finals.
FRANCE: The official poster for the 1998 World Cup finals – designed by a young art school student with no interest in soccer – is unveiled.
SOUTH KOREA: FIFA president Joao Havelange says he will try to persuade North Korea to share the 2002 World Cup finals co-host role with South Korea.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24

EL SALVADOR: The federation says that its inquiries have ruled out irregularities in the World Cup tie against Jamaica.
GREECE: Four fans go on trial after a post-game brawl which left seven people injured following the game between Ionikos and Olympiakos.
HONDURAS: Police use tear gas to break up a crowd of gun-firing fans infuriated by a referee's decision to halt a match between Vida of La Ceiba and Victoria.
ISRAEL: Shlomo Scharf is reappointed national coach until June 2000.
ITALY: Carlo Mazzone quits as coach of crisis-hit Napoli after just six games.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25

ACTION: Internazionale are surprisingly beaten 2-0 in Strasbourg in the first leg of the UEFA Cup third round.
BRAZIL: Romario and Bebeto are restored to Brazil's squad for the friendly against South Africa and subsequent Confederations Cup in Saudi Arabia.
ENGLAND: Scotland striker Kevin Gallacher agrees a deal keeping him at Blackburn until 2000...Tottenham's Swiss manager Christian Gross unveils his strict training regime to the players on his first day in charge...Arsenal midfielder Emmanuel Petit is fined £1,000 and banned for one extra game (making four) for pushing referee Paul Durkin at the end of a game with Aston Villa.
HOLLAND: Feyenoord midfielder Paul Bosvelt faxes an apology to Manchester United's Denis Irwin for the tackle which put him out of the game until 1998.
ITALY: Milan's Marcel Desailly escapes uninjured after writing off his Ferrari... Napoli appoint Giovanni Galeone coach.
MEXICO: Bora Milutinovic is fired as national coach.
SPAIN: Valencia put unsettled Brazil striker Romario up for sale.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 26

ACTION: Juventus slip to the brink of UEFA Champions League elimination as they lose 2-0 at Feyenoord.
ENGLAND: Leeds manager George Graham complains about South Africa's excessive demands on defender Lucas Radebe...John Fashanu claims his bid to become a football agent is being tied up in red tape between the FA and FIFA.
FRANCE: Auxerre midfielder Antoine Sibierski becomes the third top division player to risk a possible 18-month ban after testing positive for the anabolic steroid nandrolone following a match against Metz in September.
MALAYSIA: The AFC asks FIFA to investigate a claim by Costa Rican referee Rodrigo Badilla that he was offered £30,000 to help United Arab Emirates beat Japan in a World Cup qualifier.
PORTUGAL: New Benfica coach Graeme Souness asks Eusebio, now 55, to be a forwards coach rather than the club's international ambassador.
RUSSIA: Lokomotiv Moscow win an appeal to stay in the top division after a row over their professional status which had threatened them with relegation.
SPAIN: Top division referees say they will go on strike at the weekend after criticism from players and presidents... Valencia coach Claudio Ranieri says he will not pick Romario again.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27

ARGENTINA: National coach Daniel Passarella breaks with tradition by saying his players could have sex with their wives during the World Cup finals.
ENGLAND: Bolivian striker Jaime

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Leaving Lazio...Bepe Signori

Moreno returns to Middlesbrough on loan from America's MLS champions DC United...Pele heads an English-inspired International Hall of Fame player listing.
GREECE: Sports Minister Andreas Fouras says he is worried by a statement signed by 100 Greek MPs alleging widespread match-fixing in the League.
ITALY: Serie A clubs register a formal protest with FIFA regarding the increase in how often they are required to release foreign players for national team duty...Lazio agree to release Giuseppe Signori.
JAPAN: Takeshi Okada is confirmed as head coach for the World Cup finals.
REP IRELAND: The FAI accuses Wimbledon of misleading statements concerning their controversial proposed move from South London to Dublin.
SOUTH AFRICA: Leeds defender Lucas Radebe tells South Africa he does not want to play in the Confederations Cup for fear of losing his club place.
HOLLAND: Johan Cruyff is admitted to hospital in Amsterdam with heart trouble.
SWITZERLAND: UEFA says it will investigate accusations that Belgian police acted brutally at the Champions League tie between Lierse and Leverkusen.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28

ENGLAND: Thomas Myrhe arrives from Norway to replace goalkeeper Neville Southall at Everton.
ITALY: Lazio sell striker Giuseppe Signori to Sampdoria, who scored 129 goals in five years for the Rome club.
MEXICO: Manuel Lapuente is reappointed national boss. Lapuente, 53, held the post briefly in 1991.
SPAIN: Third Division referees are appointed as top division strike-breakers by the federation.
TURKEY: Work starts on an 80,000-capacity Olympic stadium in Ikitelli, on the outskirts of Istanbul, which will bid for the 2008 Games.
UNITED STATES: Columbus Crew goalkeeper Brad Friedel sees his proposed transfer to Liverpool frozen as his work permit application is refused.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29

ACTION: Australia and Iran draw 2-2 in their World Cup play-off second leg – Iran qualifying for the finals on away goals...in Germany, a last-minute goal by Marian Hristov hands Kaiserslautern a 2-1 victory over 10-man Hamburg and makes them the first promoted club to lead at the halfway stage...in Japan, Kashima Antlers thrash Jubilo Iwata 5-1 in the second leg of the J.League Cup Final for a 7-2 aggregate success... Kaizer Chiefs and Mamelodi Sundowns draw 1-1 after extra time in the South African Cup Final...three are sent off and eight booked as Yugoslav champions Partizan lose 6-5 to Vojvodina Novisad.

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 30

ACTION: Ghana's Goldfields beat Raja of Morocco 1-0 in the first leg of the African Champions Cup Final...in Brazil, four players are sent off and 16 booked as Internacional beat Santos 4-1 in the national championship...in Greece, goals by Demis Nikolaidis and Christos Maladenis see AEK Athens beat Verria 2-1 and retain the lead...in Scotland, Celtic beat Dundee United 3- 0 to win the Coca-Cola sponsored League Cup Final.
ALBANIA: Linesman Ndue Leka is hit by a missile at the League match in which Tomorri Berat beat Partizani Tirana 2-1.
EGYPT: The Confederation of African Football selects Victor Ikpeba of Nigeria and Monaco as Footballer of the Year.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 1

GREECE: At least 30 fans are reported injured after violence at the match between Olympiakos and Panathinaikos.
GERMANY: Borussia Monchengladbach appoint their former player Norbert Meier as head coach.
PORTUGAL: Palmeiras midfielder Alexandre Amaral rejoins Benfica on a four-year contract...referee Vitor Pereira admits he was wrong to have allowed Benfica's late winner against Belenenses on Saturday, after watching TV replays.
REP IRELAND: Manager Mick McCarthy agrees to stay on until 2000.
SPAIN: The media claims the weekend strike by top referees did their cause more harm than good because of the generally excellent displays of their com-paratively unknown substitutes.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 2

ACTION: Borussia Dortmund beat Cruzeiro 2-0 to become world club champions in Tokyo.
FRANCE: FIFA chooses Brazil, France, Germany, Argentina, Spain, Italy, Romania and Holland as the eight top seeds for the 1998 World Cup finals. FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter says that while eight of the stadia would be fence-free, problems still remained with Nantes and Saint-Etienne. FIFA wipes out all yellow cards hanging over players from the qualifying competition but not red-card suspensions.
BELGIUM: Anderlecht sack coach Rene Vandereycken.
ECUADOR: National coach Francisco Maturana says Ecuador failed to qualify for the World Cup finals because the players "were interested only in money".
IRAN: Federation president Dariush Mostafavi says he wants a new manager to lead Iran at the finals rather than Olympic team boss Valdeir Vieira.
ITALY: Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids is poised to join Juventus from Milan for £2.5million...Giuseppe Materazzi quits as coach of Brescia...striker Giuseppe Signori signs for Sampdoria from Lazio.
PORTUGAL: Sporting Lisbon name Chilean Vicente Cantatore coach.
SPAIN: Atletico Madrid refuse to release midfielder Juninho for Brazil's forthcoming friendly with South Africa and the Confederations Cup in Saudi Arabia...Pedro Cortes takes over from Francisco Roig at Valencia...Barcelona sign Dutch defender Winston Bogarde from Milan.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 3

ENGLAND: Pele, visiting London in a Brazilian government delegation, is awarded an honorary knighthood by the Queen...England skipper Alan Shearer signs a 15-year-deal with Umbro said to be worth £25million.
FRANCE: FIFA president Joao Havelange dismisses complaints from Italian and Spanish clubs about having to release players for the Confederations Cup. Sepp Blatter says that FIFA's legal affairs committee has decided that Hong Kong should be maintained as an independent member of FIFA despite the colony's recent return to Chinese ownership. FIFA confirms the TV deal for the 2002 and 2006 World Cups between ISL and the German Kirch group which will be worth £600billion for 2002 and £660billion, Kirch handling the rights for Europe and ISL for the rest of the world, though uncertainty remains over the situation regarding pay-TV.
ITALY: Milan president Silvio Berlusconi is sentenced to 16 months in jail for false accounting relating to his Fininvest business conglomerate, but will not have to serve the term. Fininvest executive Carlo Bernasconi also receives a 16-month suspended sentence.
SWITZERLAND: UEFA drops Hungarian referee Sandor Puhl from its panel for the rest of the season after he missed Paul Bosvelt's foul on Manchester United defender Denis Irwin in a Champions League tie...Grasshopper appoint departing national team coach Rolf Fringer to succeed Christian Gross.

Hospitalised...Johan Cruyff

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4

ACTION: Sao Paulo and River Plate draw 0-0 in the first leg of the South American Supercup final.
BRAZIL: A record low crowd of 55 is recorded for the championship semi-final tie between Juventude and Portuguesa.
FRANCE: The World Cup finals draw takes place in Marseille after the Rest of the World beat Europe 5-2.
ITALY: Italian and Spanish authorities reach a deal with Brazil over player release for the Confederations Cup.
SLOVAKIA: Kosice midfielder Milan Cvirk is killed and forward Albert Rusnak is badly injured in a car crash.
SWEDEN: Vastra Frolunda forward Lars-Gunnar Carlstrand delays signing for Scottish club St Johnstone because Britain's quarantine laws would part him for six months from Ted, his pet dog.
TOGO: German coach Eberhard Vogel is appointed national manager for the 1998 African Nations Cup finals.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 5

ENGLAND: Terry Venables denies reports he has resigned as chairman and director of football at Portsmouth.
GERMANY: Leaders Kaiserslautern beat Bayern Munich 2-0 to go seven points clear of the champions at the top.
HOLLAND: Former Ajax and Barcelona coach Johan Cruyff is discharged from hospital in Amsterdam.
HUNGARY: The government orders a review of sports administration after the national team's World Cup exit.
NORWAY: Rosenborg sell striker Harald Brattbakk to Celtic for £2.2million.
SPAIN: Barcelona reject claims that the club organised the provision of banners in Nou Camp criticising local media during Monday's game against Merida.
SWEDEN: IFK Gothenburg and Sheffield Wednesday agree terms for midfielder Niclas Alexandersson.
TURKEY: Romania captain Gheorghe Hagi says he will retire from international football after France 98.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 6

ACTION: Tunisia's Etoile Sahel win the African Cup-winners cup final 2-1 on aggregate after losing the second leg against FAR of Morocco...in Japan, a goal in the final minute of extra time

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brings Jubilo Iwata a 3-2 victory over Kashima Antlers in the first leg of the J.League championship play-off.
ITALY: Dutch midfielder Edgar Davids says his move from Milan to Juventus is "a dream come true".

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 7

ACTION: Brazil beat South Africa 2-1 in a friendly in Johannesburg...in Mexico, Cruz Azul win the title for the first time in 17 years with an extra time, golden goal penalty against Leon.
FRANCE: Officials reveal saboteurs tried to cut off electrical power for the World Cup draw in Marseille.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 8

AUSTRALIA: Soccer Australia says it would "loan" Terry Venables to Nigeria for six months if the African nation wanted him as World Cup boss.
ITALY: Media reports say Ruud Gullit is the latest target for a tax investigation.
SWITZERLAND: FIFA names Dennis Bergkamp, Roberto Carlos, Ronaldo and Zinedine Zidane as the four finalists for the 1997 Footballer of the Year award.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9

ACTION: In the UEFA Cup, Inter hit back to beat Strasbourg 3-2 on aggregate even though Ronaldo misses a penalty.
BELGIUM: Top clubs call for an ID card system to help reduce hooligan violence.
BULGARIA: Hristo Bonev names a strong squad for the friendly against a Catalan XI, despite controversy over the match as Bulgaria have been drawn against Spain in the World Cup finals.
GERMANY: Kaiserslautern buy Hungarian goalkeeper Lajos Szucz from Ujpest Dozsa as cover for Andreas Reinke because of injury to Czech international Petr Kouba...Third Division Union Berlin ask multi-millionaire Mohammed Al Fayed to consider buying them.
GREECE: Ionikos are ordered to play six games away from home and pay a £2,600 fine, while Olympiakos Piraeus are ordered to play once away and pay a £6.000 fine after crowd trouble at the match between the clubs in November.
ITALY: Inter's Ronaldo and president Massimo Moratti are reported to the League disciplinary panel for outspoken criticism of referee Fiorenzo Treozzi.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 10

ACTION: High drama in the last round of Champions League games as Juventus and Bayer Leverkusen squeeze through to the quarter-finals.
ARGENTINA: Independiente bring back Cesar Luis Menotti as coach, six months after he quit for an Italian stint with Sampdoria...the climax to the League championship is overshadowed by allegations that River Plate have been offering so-called 'third party bonuses' to opponents of rivals Boca Juniors.

Valencia signing...Adrian Ilie

AUSTRALIA: Graham Arnold, who retired from the national team after the World Cup failure against Iran, attacks the methods of coach Terry Venables.
BELGIUM: Goalkeeper Philippe Vande Walle, who walked out on champions Lierse in anger at being booed by the club's fans, signs for Eendracht Aalst.
BRAZIL: All members of the national squad for the Confederations Cup adopt the shaven-head look of striker Ronaldo.
ENGLAND: Barnsley take 24-year-old Estonia defender Marek Lemsalu on trial...Sheffield Wednesday give a trial to Slovenia striker Primoz Gliha.
ITALY: Milan consider sending their players on a two-day course in advanced driving after a series of car crashes involving, among others, Ibrahim Ba, Marcel Desailly and George Weah.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11

ACTION: Ajax reach the quarter-finals of the UEFA Cup with a draw in Bochum but German police arrest around 100 Dutch fans after fighting before the match.
ALBANIA: The Interior Ministry says extra police will be allocated to League matches after crowd trouble in Gjirokaster, Lushnje, Berat and Shkoder.
BRAZIL: The 'Pele Bill' to modernise the organisation of the Brazilian game is backed by the lower house of Congress.
ENGLAND: Liverpool appeal against the rejection of a work permit for United States goalkeeper Brad Friedel.
GERMANY: The federal supreme court rules that clubs, not the DFB, should market the broadcast rights to their home games in the European Cup-winners Cup and the UEFA Cup....Leverkusen's Ulf Kirsten, the League's leading scorer, is banned for nine weeks and fined £3,500 after video evidence that he elbowed Schalke's Thomas Linke in the jaw.
SAUDI ARABIA: The national federation confirms the appointment of Carlos Alberto Parreira, Brazil's winning coach in 1994, for the World Cup finals.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 12

ACTION: In the Confederations Cup, in Riyadh, Brazil beat Saudi Arabia 3-0 and Australia defeat Mexico 3-1.
BELGIUM: Jean-Marc Bosman appeals for UEFA and the Belgian federation to offer an out-of-court settlement over his damages action against them – just as leading figures in European football state growing concerns over the number of foreign players in continental leagues.
ENGLAND: Goalkeepers Bruce Grobbelaar and Hans Segers are handed suspended bans of six months and £10,000 fines after admitting misconduct in breaching betting regulations.
GERMANY: Around 60 fans, mostly Dutch, are charged with public order offences after trouble at the Bochum v Ajax UEFA Cup tie.
NIGERIA: The FA says it must delay naming a national coach pending approval by the military government.
SPAIN: Valencia sign top Romania striker Adrian Ilie from Galatasaray.
UKRAINE: Kiev Dynamo players follow up their Champions League success by joining the centrist United Social Democratic Party (USDP).

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 13

ACTION: In the Confederations Cup, the Czech Republic draw 2-2 with South Africa and Uruguay defeat United Arab Emirates 2-0...Raja Casablanca win the African Champions League Cup 5-4 on penalties against Ghana's Goldfields.... Japan forward Masashi Nakayama scores with eight minutes left to give Jubilo Iwata the J.League title with a 1-0 win over Kashima Antlers...in Portugal, Poland's Grzegorz Mielcarski nets the only goal in the last minute as leaders Porto defeat second-placed Vitoria Guimaraes.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 14

ACTION: Mexico beat Saudi Arabia 5-0 and Australia draw 0-0 with Brazil in the Confederations Cup...in Argentina, River Plate move within one point of their third consecutive League title as they defeat Colon 2-1 despite having Lionel Garcia and Roberto Montserrat sent off...in Brazil, Edmundo is sent off for the seventh time this year but Vasco hold out for a goalless draw at Palmeiras in the first leg of the national championship final...Real Madrid beat Merida to mark the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Bernabeu stadium in the Spanish capital.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 15

ACTION: In the Confederations Cup, UAE beat South Africa 1-0 and Uruguay defeat the Czech Republic 2-1.
ITALY: Milan buy striker Maurizio Ganz from arch-rivals Inter.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 16

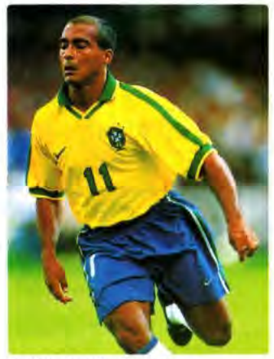
ACTION: Saudi Arabia beat Australia 1-0 and Brazil triumph 3-2 over Mexico in the Confederations Cup.
AUSTRALIA: Soccer Australia claim to have reached a preliminary agreement with Terry Venables to extend his contract to the qualifying competition for the 2002 World Cup finals.
BRAZIL: Internacional claim midfielder Anderson failed a dope test for morphine only because he had bread rolls covered in poppy seeds.
CROATIA: Hajduk Split agree to sell Sheffield Wednesday their Macedonia defender Goce Sedloski for £1.75million.
GERMANY: Borussia Dortmund's sporting director Ottmar Hitzfeld rejects an offer to become Switzerland coach.
JAMAICA: Derby striker Dean Sturridge, Marcus Gayle of Wimbledon and Chelsea defender Frank Sinclair are invited to attend a Jamaican training session.
SAUDI ARABIA: Carlos Alberto Parreira signs his new contract as national coach.
SWITZERLAND: UEFA decides that, commercial arrangements permitting, the Amsterdam Arena will stage the 1998 Champions League Final; the Cup-winners Cup final will be on May 13 at Rasunda, Stockholm; and the first single-match UEFA Cup Final will be on May 6 in Parc des Princes, Paris. Monaco will stage the Super Cup on August 28.
UNITED STATES: New MLS club Chicago Fire sign Poland captain Piotr Nowak from TSV 1860 Munich.
ZIMBABWE: The federation appoints Roy Barreto as national manager.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17

ACTION: In the Confederations Cup, the Czech Republic beat UAE 6-1 and South Africa fall 4-3 to Uruguay...England go out of the European Under-21 Championship to Greece – winning 4-2 in a play-off second leg at Norwich but losing on the away goals rule (agg 4-4)...Atletico Mineiro of Brazil win the South American CONMEBOL Cup, drawing 1-1 in the second leg with Lanus of Argentina for a 5-2 aggregate win... River Plate beat Sao Paulo 2-1 to win the South American Supercup.
BRAZIL: Pele says he is worried about the way national coach Mario Zagallo is chopping and changing the national team in the run-up to the World Cup finals.
GERMANY: Bayern Munich reach the German Cup semi-finals for the first time in 11 years by beating Bayer Leverkusen.
NIGERIA: Bora Milutinovic is appointed to lead Nigeria in the World Cup finals.
PORTUGAL: Brazilian striker Mario Jardel scores seven goals in Porto's 9-1 win over Second Division Juventude Evora in the Portuguese Cup.
SPAIN: Barcelona agree to sell France striker Christophe Dugarry to Marseille.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 18

CHINA: Chelsea are reported to be leading the chase to sign China's captain and Footballer of the Year Fan Zhiyi.
COLOMBIA: A four-team tournament is planned for Bogota in April, involving sides from Europe, South America and Africa. The federation also offers to host the 1999 Copa America if Paraguay pull out through financial difficulties.
COSTA RICA: Under-23 coach Ricardo Villalobos becomes the fourth national manager of the year.
CROATIA: Croatia Zagreb sell striker Igor Cvitanovic to Spanish side Real Sociedad for £2million...Sheffield Wednesday and Hajduk Split agree to seek independent medical advice over the in-doubt transfer of £1.6m centre back Goce Sedloski.
ENGLAND: Ipswich striker David Johnson says he is ready to pledge his international future to Jamaica after being overlooked by England Under-21s...Coventry sign Dutch Under-21 midfielder George Boateng from Feyenoord.
FRANCE: Metz thrash Monaco 3-0 to take over from them at the top of the championship...the TF1 television channel says it wants David Ginola to help


Back in Brazil...Romario

present a World Cup chat-show next year to attract more women viewers.
GERMANY: Borussia Dortmund sweeper Matthias Sammer says he hopes to play at the World Cup finals despite health problems after recent knee operations.
PORTUGAL: Humberto Coelho, former star of Benfica and Paris Saint-Germain, is named national coach.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19

ACTION: In the Confederations Cup semi-finals, Brazil beat Czech Republic 2-0 and Australia defeat Uruguay 1-0 on the golden goal rule.
BELGIUM: EC officials say they are to write to FIFA to insist that fans should be able to buy 1998 World Cup finals tickets without signing up for an expensive travel package.
DENMARK: The country's first all-sports cable television channel is to close after only 10 months because it has failed to attract enough subscribers.
ENGLAND: United States goalkeeper Brad Friedel is cleared to join Liverpool as the club win their appeal for a work permit...Crystal Palace offer Tomas Brolin a chance to resurrect his controversial Premiership career... Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger denies claims his team's title challenge is being damaged by dressing-room conflicts between English and French players.
FRANCE: Striker Christophe Dugarry joins Marseille from Barcelona...Inter striker Ronaldo wins the Golden Ball prize as European Footballer of the Year organised by *France Football* magazine... PSG say goalkeeper Bernard Lama is expected to revive his World Cup prospects by joining West Ham.
SAUDI ARABIA: Brazil striker Romario says he has been granted permission by Valencia to arrange a move to Flamengo.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 20

ARGENTINA: Police confirm the godson of World Cup hero Ubaldo Fillol was shot dead in a crowd riot at the San Lorenzo v Huracan game. He was killed in fighting before the match, which was suspended after more trouble, in the 21st minute.
GERMANY: Kaiserslautern's Otto Rehhagel and Christoph Dunn of Bayer Leverkusen extend their contracts despite lucrative offers from abroad.
IRAN: Brazilian Valdeir Vieira is retained, after all, as World Cup coach.
SOUTH AFRICA: Clive Barker quits as national coach.
SPAIN: Two goals from Luis Enrique and one by Giovanni help Barcelona to a 3-1 victory over Atletico Madrid and consolidate their League leadership status.

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 21

ACTION: Brazil thrash Australia 6-0, with hat-tricks from Ronaldo and Romario, in the Confederations Cup Final. The third place play-off sees the Czech Republic beat Uruguay 1-0...in Argentina, River Plate win a record-breaking third consecutive League title, just days after they beat Brazil's Sao Paulo in the South America Supercup...Vasco da Gama win the Brazilian national championship for the third time against Palmeiras...Colo Colo beat Temuco 4-0 to celebrate victory in the strike-hit Chilean championship...in Colombia, America players are stripped nearly naked by delighted fans after winning the championship for the ninth time...Olimpia win the Paraguayan championship...in Holland, runaway leaders Ajax lose their first League game of the season, 4-3 at home to second-placed PSV Eindhoven...in Italy, an injury time goal from German striker Oliver Bierhoff condemns leaders Inter to a 1-0 defeat and ends their unbeaten League record.
GERMANY: Bayern midfielder Christian Nerlinger says he will leave Munich at the end of the season for Borussia Dortmund where his father played in the 1970s.
NIGERIA: The appointment of Bora Milutinovic as national coach receives a mixed reception from fans and media.
SAUDI ARABIA: Immediately after the Czech Republic win their Confederations Cup third place play-off, coach Dusan Uhrin says he is leaving to join Al-Nasr of the United Arab Emirates.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 22

CROATIA: Miroslav Blazevic drops Nikola Jerkan, Igor Stimac and Nikola Jurcevic from his list of 30 players in contention for a World Cup place.
ENGLAND: The Premier League game between Wimbledon and Arsenal at Crystal Palace is abandoned at the start of the second half due to a floodlight failure...Robbie Earle warns English-based players considering an opportunist switch to Jamaica for the World Cup that their arrival would cause resentment among the squad and fans...Newcastle say they intend to expand their existing ground after being outflanked by protesters over plans to build a new stadium... Spurs buy back Germany captain Jurgen Klinsmann on loan from Sampdoria for the rest of the season and appoint former manager David Pleat as director of football.
FRANCE: Ronaldo is confirmed as the 1997 European Footballer of the Year.
SPAIN: Atletico Madrid president Jesus Gil attacks referee Miguel Perez Lasa over his handling of the Barcelona match.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 23

ACTION: A Catalan XI draws 1-1 with Bulgaria in Barcelona.
ARGENTINA: The Security Ministry sets up a special police unit with emergency powers to crack down on hooligans.
SPAIN: Top referee Antonio Lopez Nieto calls for jail sentences to be imposed on thugs who attack match officials after a weekend when officials at five lower division matches were assaulted.
SWITZERLAND: Grasshopper sell Romania striker Viorel Moldovan to Coventry for £4million.

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 24

BELGIUM: Lawyers acting for Nottingham Forest and 16 former players start court action against Anderlecht over the 1984 UEFA Cup bribery scandal.
IRAN: Federation president Dariush Mostafavi is fired after failing to replace World Cup hero-coach Valdeir Vieira.

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 26

FRANCE: Dope test officials upset national coach Aime Jacquet by turning up to test six playres during the ski-slope squad 'family get-together.'
GEORGIA: Ex-Soviet Union forward Vladimir Gutsayev is appointed national coach in succession to David Kipiani.

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 27

ARGENTINA: Diego Maradona says he is considering standing as Napoli president.
BELGIUM: Lierse buy ex-Holland goalkeeper Stanley Menzo from Bordeaux.
HOLLAND: PSV's Phillip Cocu agrees a move to Barcelona at the season's end.
ITALY: Sampdoria agree to sign Yugoslavia striker Zoran Jovicic from Red Star Belgrade at the end of the season.
PORTUGAL: Vicente Cantatore quits as Sporting coach after only three games...Benfica buy Czech winger Karel Poborsky from Manchester United.

MONDAY, DECEMBER 29

ENGLAND: The future of coach Christian Gross at Tottenham is thrown into doubt as fitness coach Fritz Schmid is refused a work permit.
ITALY: Naples politican and businessman Nicola Rivelli say he is negotiating to bring Diego Maradona back to Napoli as player-coach if he can buy out long-time owner Corrado Ferlaino...Napoli sign Croatia midfielder Aljosa Asanovic from Derby.
NIGERIA: The federation says it will not play national teams of countries hostile to its military rulers while preparing for the World Cup finals.

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 30

BRAZIL: Botafogo sack coach Carlos Alberto Torres after only three months.
SPAIN: Real Madrid president Lorenzo Sanz says Christian Karembeu has finally signed and could play against Atletico Madrid on January 10...Valencia register Uruguayan Nicolas Olivera, the star of the World Youth Cup in Malaysia.

OBITUARIES

ANATOLI BANISHEVSKY, star Soviet centre-forward in the late 1960s, has died aged 50 in his native Azerbaijan. Banishevsky, who scored 40 goals in 50 internationals, led the attack of the Soviet side who finished a best-ever fourth in the 1966 World Cup finals. He scored 109 goals in the Supreme Soviet championship despite spending all his career with unfashionable Neftchi Baku.

BILLY BREMNER, former Scotland and Leeds captain, died from a heart attack, aged 54. Bremner, a terrier-like right-half or midfielder, was capped 54 times for Scotland, played in the 1974 World Cup finals and made 585 League appearances for Leeds in addition to 61 for Hull. Bremner joined Leeds in December 1959 and swiftly became a key man, winning two English League titles and the FA Cup as well as finishing Champions Cup runners-up in 1975. His fierce commitment sometimes landed him in trouble, most notably in the 1974 Charity Shield when he and Liverpool's Kevin Keegan became the first players to be sent off at Wembley in a competitive domestic fixture. He was manager of Leeds from 1985 to 1988.

Running the rule

FA Technical Director Howard Wilkinson talks to Kevin Palmer about the implications for coaches of recent rule changes in the game

WORLD CUP year will inevitably see the familiar tightening up of the laws in a game that has already undergone a radical transformation in recent years.

From the plethora of red and yellow cards that will be brandished throughout France 98 – many for relatively minor offences – to the enforcement of laws such as the modified offside ruling, the game has taken on a very different complexion since the likes of England and West Germany reigned over the world in the late 1960s and early 70s.

With those changes have come the modification in coaching methods to mould players capable of coping with the new rules. For those who have known nothing but the days of 'active' and 'passive' strikers and the like, it is not so much of a problem, but for those who have played in the days when playing out time was an accepted aspect of an afternoon, it can take time to adjust.

It seems FIFA's drive to open up the game and create more goalscoring possibilities has had its desired effect. "The primary difference in the game is the fact that it is no longer compressed into small pockets on the field," explains FA Technical Director Howard Wilkinson. "Teams are being forced to defend deeper and that stretches the play and creates new problems for a coach.

"Playing through the middle is now more important than ever. Previously, English teams focused on creating opportunities from set-plays or crosses, but you just have to look at players like Bergkamp and Zola to see that flair is flourishing in our Premiership.

"The changes in the law on the tackle from behind are an obvious explanation for the impact made by certain players in recent years. There is now the opportunity to turn with the ball, time to dribble, and that wasn't always the case in the past."

'Teams are being forced to defend deeper and that stretches play and creates new problems for a coach'

The English trait of softening up a striker is no longer acceptable. The theory of 'letting him know that you are around in the first 10 minutes with a couple of hefty tackles' is no longer possible in the modern climate. Now it is very much a case of making sure you don't get booked early on. It is a creed that has changed the coaching ethos as well as the players' mental approach.

"Coaching has to change with the times," confirms Wilkinson. "For example, we would never have looked at specialist goalkeeping coaches a few years back. Now, it is important that a goalkeeper is equally as comfortable on the ball as any other player.

"There has also needed to be a change in the levels of fitness among players because the pace of the game has quickened dramatically. The introduction of the time limits on goalkeepers releasing the ball this season has meant there is little or no time for conserving energy in games."

Flair player...Chelsea's Gianfranco Zola

Wilkinson upbeat about FA coaching badge standards

THE much-vaunted arrival of some of the game's legendary names on English shores has raised concerns over the first-team chances available to home-grown talent at the highest level. But the FA Coaches Association is confident that its new coaching courses will transform the English game for ever.

"I can confidently state that we will be offering the finest coaching courses in the world by 1999," says Wilkinson. "The ultimate aim has to be seeing more teams packed with English players. It is the way forward for the national team, which has to be of primary concern.

"And if we are looking for an example to follow, Manchester United have shown what is possible with a lot of English kids. That's not to deny the fact that the foreigners have added greatly to our game in recent years."

Chelsea boss Ruud Gullit is one who has lambasted the FA coaching badge as worthless in recent weeks, but Wilkinson insists that scorn will soon turn to praise.

"Our blue riband coaching course for senior and international players will produce some top-quality coaches for the future, and that can only be good for our game.

"There has been some criticism of the courses available in England from certain people, but that is all about to change. It won't be long before the English coaching badge is the standard bearer in world football."

Your chance to join the newly launched FA Coaches Association

FOR FA Technical Director Howard Wilkinson the launch of the FA Coaches Association is the first step in the implementation of his 'Charter for Quality' and an important chance to raise the profile of coaching in the UK. "Our goal is a better educated, informed and knowledgable pool of football coaches," he says.

The objectives of the new organisation are:

- to establish and maintain high ethical standards in coaching.
- to satisfy the desire for in-service training and continuing professional development (CPD) for those who have attended FA courses.
- to communicate with and develop communication among coaches.
- to improve and enhance the role of the 'coach' and the process of 'coaching'.
- to develop a register of qualified, disciplined and screened coaches.

THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

- An initial joining pack.
- Four issues of the FA Coaches Association journal *Insight*.
- Regional activities (UK members).
- Insurance protection (UK members).
- Exclusive education and training opportunities.
- CPD record.
- Coaching merchandise.
- Internet service.
- European Union of Football Coaches.

MEMBERSHIP COSTS

(12 months)
UK individual £35.
UK individual (if paid by direct debit) £29.50.
UK and overseas institutional £29.50.
Overseas individual £29.50.

HOW TO JOIN

For more information on how to join the FACA, phone **01707 651840**.

World Service

New, bigger and better... Your complete guide to the month's stats and facts

Anything but a close shave...Brazil celebrate their ritual slaughter of Australia in the Final of the Confederations Cup. Full report, page 49.

INTERNATIONAL RESULTS

INDEX

Algeria - Egypt (1-2, Dec 20)
Australia - Iran (2-2, Nov 29), Mexico (3-1, Dec 12), Brazil (0-0, Dec 14; 0-6, Dec 21), Saudi Arabia (1-0, Dec 16), Uruguay (1-0, Dec 19)
Brazil - South Africa (1-2, Dec 7), Saudi Arabia (0-3, Dec 12), Australia (0-0, Dec 14; 0-6, Dec 21), Mexico (3-2, Dec 16), Czech Republic (2-0, Dec 19)
Czech Republic - South Africa (2-2, Dec 13), Uruguay (2-1, Dec 15; 1-0, Dec 21), UAE (6-1, Dec 17), Brazil (2-0, Dec 19)
Egypt - Ghana (3-2, Dec 3), Togo (7-2, Dec 18), Algeria (1-2, Dec 20)
Estonia - Philippines (0-1, Nov 27)
Ghana - Egypt (3-2, Dec 3)
Iceland - Saudi Arabia (0-0, Dec 7)
Iran - Australia (2-2, Nov 29)
Mexico - Australia (3-1, Dec 12), Brazil (3-2, Dec 16)
Morocco - Togo (3-0, Nov 26), Saudi Arabia (0-5, Dec 14)
Nigeria - Zambia (2-0, Dec 15; 0-0, Dec 17)
Philippines - Estonia (0-1, Nov 27)
Saudi Arabia - Iceland (0-0, Dec 7), Brazil (0-3, Dec 12), Mexico (0-5, Dec 14), Australia (1-0, Dec 16)
South Africa - Brazil (1-2, Dec 7), Czech Republic (2-2, Dec 13), UAE (1-0, Dec 15), Uruguay (4-3, Dec 17)
Togo - Morocco (3-0, Nov 26), Egypt (7-2, Dec 18)
UAE - Uruguay (0-2, Dec 13), South Africa (0-1, Dec 15), Czech Republic (6-1, Dec 17)
Uruguay - United Arab Emirates (0-2, Dec 13), Czech Republic (2-1, Dec 15; 1-0, Dec 21), South Africa (4-3, Dec 17), Australia (1-0, Dec 19)
Zambia - Nigeria (2-0, Dec 15; 0-0, Dec 17)

Wednesday, November 26

Nov 26 - Rabat - friendly
Morocco 3 (Abrami 56pen, Camacho 72, Ouakili 88)
Togo 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 5,000. **Ref:** Belaqtoun
Morocco: Benzekri - Abrami, Rossi, Laaroussi, El Hadrioui, Chip (Amzine), Azzouzi, Chiba, Ouakili, Mghizrat (Hababi), El Khattabi (Camacho).
Togo: Takole (Adantor Akakpo) - Ametokodo, Kpousihoun, Agbobli, Gnenikakou, Dick, M. Innoussa, Tchagnao, Dote, Akpalo, Balagou.

Thursday, November 27

Nov 27 - Rabat - friendly
Philippines 0
Estonia 1 (Kristal 46)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 3,000. **Ref:** Jerry Andres (Phi)
Philippines: Sabacan (San Agustin 87) - Jalbuena, Tonog, Talavera, Betita (Gener 59), Zamora (Villarina 87), Leyble (Margarcy 70), Lobaton (Abijay 85), Bedia (Sobremesana 69).
Estonia: Tohver - Lemsalu, Kirs, Nommik (Olesk 75), U Rooba (Anniste 85), Alonen (Saviauk 71), Viikmae (Magi 74), Terekhov (Meet 46), Kristal, Reim, Oper (Smirnov 65).

Saturday, November 29

Nov 29 - Melbourne, MCG - WC Asia-Oceania play-off 2nd leg
Australia 2 (Kewell 32, Aurelio Vidmar 48)
Iran 2 (Karim Bagheri 77, Khodadad Azizi 80)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 85,000. **Ref:** Puhl (Hun)
3-3 agg. Iran qualify on away goals
Australia: Bosnich - Horvat, Tobin, Moore (Arnold 83), Zelic, Slater (Tony Vidmar 81), Foster, Lazaridis, Aurelio Vidmar (Tapai 83), Kewell, Viduka.
Iran: Ahmadreza Abedzadeh - Mohammadali Peiravany, Mohammed Khakpour, Mehdi Pasharzadeh, Naeim Sadavisad (Seyed Ebrahim 75; Aliakbar Ostadasadli 84), Reza Shahroudi (Alireza Mansourian 57), Hamidreza Estili, Karim Bagheri, Mehdi Mahdavikia, Khodadad Azizi, Ali Daei.

Wednesday, December 3

Dec 3 - Cairo - friendly
Egypt 3
Ghana 2
Att: 25,000

Sunday, December 7

Dec 7 - Johannesburg - intl friendly
South Africa 1 (Helman Mkhalele 72)
Brazil 2 (Romario 10, Bebeto 37)
HT: 0-2. **Att:** 40,000. **Ref:** Sesikwe (Botswana)
S Africa: Arendse - Motaung, Jackson (Mkhalele, 52), Fish, Masinga, Tovey, Moshoeu (Ndlanya 85), Khumalo, Moeti (Augustine 53), Radebe, Tinkler (Ngobe 74).
Brazil: Dida - Ze Maria, Aldair (Goncalves, 76), Junior Baiano, Cesar Samaio, Ze Roberto, Bebeto (Doriva 82), Dunga (Russo 90), Rodrigo, Denilson, Romario.

Dec 7 - Riyadh - friendly
Saudi Arabia 0
Iceland 0
Att: 30,000

Friday, December 12

Dec 12 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp A
Saudi Arabia 0
Brazil 3 (Cesar Sampaio 65, Romario 74, 81)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 45,000. **Ref:** Levnikov (Rus)
S Arabia: Mohammed Al-Deayea - Mohammed Al-Jahani, Mohammed Al-Khilaiwi, *Abdullah Zubromawi, Ibrahim Al-Harbi, Hussein Sulimani - Saeed Owairan (Khalid Al-Temawi 43), Khalid Al-Mowalad, Khamis Al-Dossary - Samir Al-aber, Fahad Mehalel (Ibrahim Al-Shahrani 62). *Abdullah Zubramawi sent off, 65min.*
Brazil: Dida - Cafu (Ze Maria 75), Aldair, Junior Baiano, Ze Roberto - Flavio Conceicao, Leonardo (Juninho 71), Cesar Sampaio, Denilson (Rivaldo 74) - Ronaldo, Romario.

Dec 12 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp A
Australia 3 (Viduka 45, Aloisi 61, Mori 90)
Mexico 1 (Hernandez pen 80)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Un Prasert (Thai)
Australia: Kalac - Horvat, Lazaridis, Tobin, Tony Vidmar - Zelic, Slater (Tapai 80), Foster, Aloisi - Viduka (Mori 72), Aurelio Vidmar (Hoker 46).
Mexico: Sanchez - Suarez, Gabriel (Hernandez 62), Luna, Lara - Ramon Ramirez, Pardo, Terrazas (Carmona 66), Abundis - Chavez (Luis Garcia 46), Blanco.

Saturday, December 13

Dec 13 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp B
Czech Republic 2 (Smicer 20, 40)
South Africa 2 (Augustine 39, Mkhalele 86)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 3,500. **Ref:** Ortube (Bol)
Czech Rep: Srnicek - Hornak, Svoboda, Rada, Vlcek - Nedved, *Nemec, Bejbl, Lasota - Kuka (Sloncik 89), Smicer (Poborsky 84). **Nemec sent off, 83min.*
S Africa: Arendse - Motaung, Jackosn, Fish, Tovey - Moshoeu, Mkhalele, Khumalo (Ngobe 37), Moeti - Masinga, Augustine (Williams 73).

Dec 13 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp B
United Arab Emirates 0
Uruguay 2 (Olivera 47, Pacheco 90)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 3,500. **Ref:** Ramesh
UAE: Muhsin Faraj - Hassan Mubarak, Ismail Rashed, Adel Ahmed, Mohamed Obaid - Saad Bakhit, Mohamed Ali (Adnan Altalyani 72), Hassan Saeed Ahmed - Yaser Sale (Khamis Saad 72), Anbaar Juma Aljunabi (Munther Abdulla 83), Ali Gholam.
Uruguay: Flores - Lopez, Montero, Mendez, De los Santos - Adinolfi, Garcia, Vespa (Pablo Hernandez 89), Recoba - Zelayeta, Olivera (Pacheco 74).

Sunday, December 14

Dec 14 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp A
Saudi Arabia 0
Mexico 5 (Palencia 19, 62, Blanco 70, 78, Luna 76)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 10,000. **Ref:** Levnikov (Rus)
S Arabia: Mohammed Al-Deayea - Mohammed Al-Jahani, Mohammed Al-Khilaiwi, Hussein Sulimani, Mohammed Al-Sahafi - Ibrahim Al-Harbi, Khalid Al-Mowallid, Khamis Al-Dossary, Saeed Owairan (Khalid Al-Temawi 66) - Sami Al-Jaber, Fahad Mehalel.
Mexico: Sanchez - Suarez, Davina, Pardo, Carmona - Villa, Lara (Lopez 57), Luna - Chavez (Hernandez 46), Blanco, Palencia.

Dec 14 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp A
Australia 0
Brazil 0
Att: 10,000. **Ref:** Bouchardeau (Nga)
Australia: Bosnich - Horvat, Lazaridis, Ivanovic, Tobin, Tony Vidmar - Zelic, Foster, Aurelio Vidmar (Tapai 60), Aloisi (Mori 68) - Viduka (Ingley 89).
Brazil: Dida - Aldair, Junior Baiano, Roberto Carlos, Ze Maria - Flavio Conceicao, Leonardo, Cesar Sampaio (Doriva 88), Rivaldo (Denilson 63) - Bebeto, Ronaldo.

Monday, December 15

Dec 15 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp B
United Arab Emirates 1 (Hassan Mubarak Suhail 1)
South Africa 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 5,000. **Ref:** Ortube (Bol)
UAE: Mohsen Musabeh - Hassan Soheil, Ismail Rashed, Bakhit Saad, Adel Mohammed, Yaser Salem, Adnan Talyani (Khamis Saad 67), Mohammed Ali (Abdul Salam Junaibi 67), Hasan Saeed, Ali Hassan (Munzer Ali 82), Mohammed Obaid.
S Africa: Arendse - Motaung, Jackson (Nyathi 46), Fish, Masinga, Tovey, Moshoeu, Mkhalele, Augustine (Williams 58), Ngobe, Moeti (Ndlanya 83).

Dec 15 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp B
Uruguay 2 (Olivera 25, Zalayeta 87)
Czech Republic 1 (Siegl 89)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 8,000. **Ref:** Saad Kameel (Kwt)
Uruguay: Flores - Lopez, Montero, Mendez, De los Santos, Adinolfi, Garcia, Vespa (Hernandez 88), Zalayeta, Olivera (Recoba 65), Dario Silva (Callejas 75).
Czech Rep: Srnicek - Nedved, Hornak (Kozel 68), Svoboda, Poborsky, Kuka (Siegl 59), Bejbl, Rada, Vicek, Lasota (Frydek 46), Smicer.

Dec 15 - Lusaka - friendly
Zambia 2 (Sakulanda 47, Kamwanga 55)
Nigeria 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 20,000

Tuesday, December 16

Dec 16 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp A
Saudi Arabia 1 (Mohammed Al-Khilaiwi 40)
Australia 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Castrilli (Arg)
S Arabia: Mohammed Al-Deayea - Ahmed Al-Dossari, Mohammed Al-Khilaiwi, Abdullah Zubromawi, Hussein Sulimani - Ibrahim Al-Harbi, Saeed Owairan (Khamis Al-Zahrani 89), Khalid Al-Mowallid (Khalid Al-Temawi 76), Khamis Al-Dossary - Sami Al-Jaber, Fahad Mehalel (Obied Al-Dossary 67).
Australia: Bosnich - Horvat, Lazaridis, Ivanovic, Tobin - Zelic, Slater, Foster, Skoko (Aurelio Vidmar 74) - Mori (Viduka 66), Aloisi (Kewell 66).

Dec 16 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp A
Brazil 3 (Romario pen 41, Denilson 58, Junior Baiano 66)
Mexico 2 (Blanco 52, Ramon Ramirez 90)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Mcleod (SA) sub by Pirom Un Prasert (Thai)
Brazil: Dida (Rogerio 82) - Aldair, Junior Baiano, Roberto Carlos, Ze Maria, Dunga, Flavio Conceicao, Denilson, Juninho, Ronaldo (Bebeto 46), Romario.
Mexico: Perez - Suarez, Gabriel (Luis Garcia 61), Davino, Pardo - Lara, Luna (Ramon Ramirez 46), Palencia, Carmona, Blanco - Hernandez.

Wednesday, December 17

Dec 17 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp B
Czech Republic 6 (Mohamed Obaid og 11, Nedved 22, 42, Smicer 31, 68, 71)
United Arab Emirates 1 (Adnan Altalyani 78)
HT: 4-0. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Ortube (Bol)
Czech Rep: Srnicek - Hornak (Lasota 64), Svoboda, Rada, Vicek - Nedved, Nemec, Bejbl - Kuka, Siegl (Lokvenc 83), Smicer.
UAE: Muhsin Maraj Mosabbah - Hassan Suhail Mubarak, Ismail Rashid, Ali Hassan Gholam, Mohamed Obaid (Abdul Salam Juma 46) - Adil Mohammed Ahmed (Munzir Ali Abdulla 59), Mohamed Ali, Hassan Saeed Ahmed, Sad Khamis Bakhit - Adnan Al-Talyani, Yaser Salim (Khamis Saad 46).

In full flight...Ronaldo wins a penalty in the Confederations Cup Final

Dec 17 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup gp B
Uruguay 4 (Dario Silva 12, 66, Recoba 42, Callejas 90)
South Africa 3 (Radebe 11, Mkhalele 69, Ndlanya 77)
HT: 2-1. **Att:** 15,000. **Ref:** Ramesh Ramdhan (Trinidad)
Uruguay: Nicola - Lopez (De los Santos 67), Dario Silva, Hernandez, Callejas, Diaz, Pellegrin, Coelho (Garcia 78), Rivas, Pacheco (Vespa 77), Recoba.
S Africa: Baloyi - Motaung (Jackson 46), Nyathi, Fish, Masinga, Moshoeu (Ndlanya 76), Mkhalele, Williams (Larsen 70), Moeti, Radebe, Tinkler.

Dec 17 - Kitwe - friendly
Zambia 0
Nigeria 0 **Att:** 18,000

Thursday, December 18

Dec 18 - Assouan - friendly
Egypt 7
Togo 2 **Att:** 10,000

Friday, December 19

Dec 19 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup semi-final
Brazil 2 (Romario 53, Ronaldo 82)
Czech Republic 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Bouchardeau (Nga)
Brazil: Dida - Cafu, Aldair, Dunga, Junior Baiano (Goncalves 69), Roberto Carlos, Flavio Conceicao (Cesar Sampaio 88), Ronaldo, Juninho, Romario, Leonardo (Denilson 46).
Czech Rep: Srnicek - Nedved (Ulich 73), Hornak (Poborsky 81), Svoboda, Nemec, Kuka, Bejbl (Kozel 89), Rada, Vicek, Lasota, Smicer.

Dec 19 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup semi-final
Australia 1 (Kewell 91)
Uruguay 0
HT: 0-0. **90min:** 0-0. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Levnikov (Rus)
Australia on golden goal
Australia: Bosnich - Laziridis, Ivanovic, Tobin, Tony Vidmar, Zelic, Foster, Aurelio Vidmar (Skoko 81), Muscat, Viduka, Kewell.
Uruguay: Flores - Lopez, Montero, Mendez, De los Santos, Alinolfi, Garcia, Vespa, Recoba (Dario Silva 80), Zelayeta, Olivera.

Saturday, December 20

Dec 20 - Assouan - friendly
Egypt 1 (Khashaba pen 88)
Algeria 2 (Benamara 42, Saib pen 60)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 50,000
Egypt: El-Hadary - Ah Hassan, Abdelhady (El-Saqqa), S Kamouna, M Youssef, M Emara, T Mostafa, Khashaba, W Salaheddine (Magdi El-Sayed, Ah Abdallah), A S Sabry, Hossam Hassan.
Algeria: Hamened (Haniched) - Ghoul, Habri, Benzerga, Benamara, Zouani, Saib, Dahleb, Zerrouafi, Adjali, Ali Moussa.

Sunday, December 21

Dec 21 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup Final
Australia 0
Brazil 6 (Ronaldo 15, 28, 59, Romario 38, 53, pen 75)
HT: 0-3. **Att:** 40,000. **Ref:** Un Prasert (Thai)
Brazil: Dida - Cafu, Aldair, Junior Baiano, Roberto Carlos, Juninho, Dunga, Cesar Sampaio, Denilson, Romario, Ronaldo.
Australia: Bosnich - Horvat, Lazaridis, Tobin, Ivanovic, Zelic, Foster, Viduka, Aurelio Vidmar (Aloisi 30), Tony Vidmar (Muscat 30), Kewell.

Dec 21 - Riyadh - Confederations Cup 3rd plce Play-off
Czech Republic 1 (Lasota 62)
Uruguay 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Bouchardeau (Niger)
Uruguay: Flores - Lopez (Hernandez 65), Montero, Mendez, De los Santos (Callejas 46), Adinolfi, Garcia, Vespa (Dario Silva 78), Zalayeta, Olivera, Recoba.
Czech Rep: Srnicek - Nedved, Svoboda, Nemec, Kuka, Bejbl (Lasota 58), Rada, Vicek, Smicer (Poborsky 77), Lokvenc (Hornak 87), Fukal.

European Under-21 C'ship

Qualifying play-off, 2nd leg

Dec 17 (Norwich): **England 4** (Heskey 21, 34, Owen 60, Hall 78) **Greece 2** (Konstantinidis 28, Hall og 30).
Greece win on away goals, 4-4 agg.

Other matches

Dec 23 (Barcelona): **Catalunya XI 1** (Dani Garcia 6)
Bulgaria 1 (Quique Alvarez og 35). **Att:** 35,000.

CONFEDERATIONS CUP

Here to stay

Mark Gleeson in Riyadh reports on a tournament which FIFA sees as an ideal warm-up for the World Cup

THE Confederations Cup might yet prove to be the ideal, long term curtain-raiser for future World Cup finals. At least that is the way FIFA would like to it develop.

An event involving the champions of the six continents, the World Cup winners and the host nation should provide enough of a mouth-watering mix to ensure its future as a warm-up for the biggest football show on earth, despite criticism from clubs who had to release players for yet another international get-together.

The recent event in Saudi Arabia perhaps fell a little short of the mark. Only four of the eight participants had qualified for the World Cup in France this year, which took some of the gloss away.

So did Germany's decision to turn their back on the event, even though they had the right to play as reigning European champions.

But there was enough entertaining football, and dramatic twists, to suggest this competition might yet find a little niche of its own. It's hard to downgrade the status of any event in which Brazil are the star attraction.

The world champions sent their entire squad to Riyadh because coach Mario Zagallo believed it would be one of the few chances he would have to employ a full-strength side before the summer showpiece.

The presence of Ronaldo, Romario, Leonardo, Bebeto, Juninho and Dunga, plus the new generation's Denilson and Rivaldo, made Brazil the strong favourites going into the week-long event, runaway winners when it concluded.

A 6-0 triumph over 10-man Australia in the final prompted Zagallo to predict that his team will be world champions again in July. They certainly looked unbeatable in steamrolling the Socceroos, but they were not always so convincing.

They struggled against Saudi Arabia in their opening game, and were then held to a goalless draw by Australia in a group match that sent a strong signal to future opponents on how to stifle the world champions.

Ronaldo looked jaded and Romario lethargic, despite sharing 10 goals in five games. Leonardo lost his midfield place after three, and Rivaldo rarely impressed. Denilson was named the tournament's best player but the real revelation was goalkeeper Dida. That department often has been a weak point in the Brazilian armoury.

Zagallo might believe he has found the right combination for France but there will be those who disagree. The juggernaut is not as daunting as many pundits might think.

Saudi Arabia is as exotic a location for football as any, with perhaps the finest facilities anywhere, and they proved able and willing hosts.

The King Fahd stadium, on the outskirts of Riyadh, has more gold than grass, but little atmosphere. Spectators were in short supply, despite a car being given away after each evening's football, together with diamond-encrusted gold watches for lucky ticket-holders. When the fans did go, though, they were served up plenty of entertainment.

Uruguay went with a transformed squad after their disappointing World Cup non-qualifying campaign, and hinted that they could rediscover footballing glories of old. Australia delighted with their doggedness and the Czechs suggested that second place at Euro 96 was no fluke.

Mexico were a busy team, but did not give any indication that they could be a surprise package in France, and the same could be said of South Africa. They were the only team not to win a game, and the combination of domestic displeasure and a furious federation pesuaded coach Clive Barker to jump ship before he was pushed overboard when they returned home.

The Saudis, who have since employed Carlos Alberto Parreira on a £2million contract, also need to step up several gears before the World Cup gets under way.

FIFA are convinced there was a strong enough script written in Riyadh to do it all over again. January 1999 is being pencilled in as the date for the next Confederations Cup, with Australia, where the 2000 Olympic Games will be held, as possible hosts.

Despite an already overcrowded international football calendar, the Confederations Cup looks likely to become a permanent fixture.

GROUP STAGES

Parreira returns as Saudis slip

AFTER the first three matches in GROUP A, Brazil certainly did not deserve the title of world beaters. Saudi Arabia and Australia, both ostensibly cannon fodder, had proved anything but.

The Saudis capitulated only when they were down to 10 men following the dismissal of defender Abdullah Zubromawi for a second bookable offence, after 65 minutes, and the Brazilians' 3-0 victory margin was flattering to say the least.

Australia looked competent and workmanlike in beating Mexico 3-1. They were tight in defence and quick on the break: given the heartbreak of their undeserved World Cup play-off elimination by Iran, on away goals, just a few weeks previously, it was a marvellous pick-up.

A 6-0 drubbing by Brazil leaves Australia's Terry Venables scratching his head

Their next match, against Brazil, created an even bigger surprise, when a five-man defence and some superb goalkeeping from Aston Villa's Mark Bosnich kept Ronaldo and Bebeto at bay and earned the Socceroos a goalless draw.

Mexico threw themselves a lifeline by crushing the Saudi Arabians 5-0 in their second match, with Braulio Luna among the scorers in only his second international. The Saudi performance was typical of a team from the Arab world; once behind, their heads dropped and it became almost an exhibition game for Mexico.

Even the home fans cheered every move the Mexicans made. The defeat meant Saudi Arabia were knocked out on the day Carlos Alberto Parreira arrived to take over as coach.

Fireworks were not expected on the final day of the group matches, with Brazil and Australia well on their way to the semi-finals. But Australia, drained by the passion of their fine performance against Brazil two days earlier, lost 1-0 to Saudi Arabia and handed Mexico a slim lifeline.

A draw in the final Group A match with Brazil would have been enough for the CONCACAF champions to sneak through ahead of Australia and they played accordingly, with a packed defence.

Then, a penalty just before the interval, converted by Romario, meant they had to make a game of it and Brazil, with space to play, cruised to a 3-2 win, only conceding the second goal in the last minute.

In GROUP B, Uruguay arrived with a new coach and a new squad, seven of whom had played in the side that came second at the Under-20 championships in Malaysia.

There was no place for the likes of Daniel Fonseca in Victor Pua's plans and Riyadh was supposed to be the arena for experimentation and rebuilding. But Uruguay surprised even themselves by finishing top with a 100 per cent record.

The first victory, over the weakest team in the tournament – the United Arab Emirates – was simple enough. Nicolas Olivera and Marcelo Zalayeta, stars of the Under-20 championships, got the goals – and Zalayeta later signed for Juventus.

The Czech Republic, substituting for Germany, and South Africa served up an exciting feast in the second match. The Czechs led 2-1 at the break, having had at least two other clear chances, but in the second half it was all South Africa, and Helman Mkhalele levelled the scores five minutes from time.

Two days later, against UAE, the South Africans were caught out after only 47 seconds by Hassan Suhail Muburak who scored the only goal after nipping in on the blind side.

South Africa were to rue the absence of captain Lucas Radebe and tough-tackling midfielder Eric Tinkler, who had been allowed to miss the first game to play for their English clubs and who contrived to miss the plane to Riyadh and arrived too late for the second game.

As coach Clive Barker, said: "If we had played for another 90 minutes, we still would not have scored."

The result gave added importance to the next match, between Uruguay and the Czechs, with the winner almost sure to finish top and thereby avoiding Brazil in the semi-finals. Olivera pounced on a half-chance to score the opener, and when Karel Poborsky was sent off for tugging Olivera to the ground and kicking him, the game swung firmly in the South Americans' favour.

Zalayeta got a second, and Horst Siegl's reply came with the last kick.

The Czechs needed to beat the Emirates handsomely to set South Africa an impossible target against Uruguay, and that is exactly what they did: 6-1, with a hat-trick from Vladimir Smicer and a double from the impressive Pavel Nedved.

So South Africa needed to win by six clear goals to pip the Czechs to second place. That was way beyond them, and though they played a full part in a pulsating match, they lost 4-3, with teenager Christian Callejas blasting a last-minute winner.

Zagallo had complained about the defensive attitude of opponents before the SEMI-FINALS, and the Brazilian coach was delighted when the Czechs came out of their shell.

Despite being ruled out earlier, Ronaldo and Denilson (a second-half substitute) were on display and the latter, the world's most expensive player, changed the course of the game with his running on the flanks.

Romario scored his fourth goal of the tournament, then Denilson set up Ronaldo, newly-crowned European Footballer of the Year, with his first. That left him with a big smile after he had had done everything but score in the three previous games.

Uruguay were heavily fancied against Australia, but rarely created chances. Alvaro Recoba showed glimpses of the talent that Inter Milan saw in him at the Copa America, then ran out of pace, and young Olivera and Zalayeta were closely watched.

The match went into extra time, and a surprise error by keeper Claudio Flores allowed Harry Kewell of Leeds to score a golden goal for the Aussies after only two minutes, giving them a place in the final.

Another error from Flores, seized on by Edvard Lasota, cost his country THIRD PLACE, giving the enterprising Czechs a deserved single-goal victory, against the tired-looking Uruguayans in the bronze medal decider.

THE FINAL

Socceroos to the slaughter

RONALDO fired Brazil ahead after 15 minutes after a decisive Denilson run.

Nine minutes later, Mark Viduka was sent off, which put paid to any hopes coach Terry Venables and his team might have had.

Ronaldo caught Australia's defence napping for the second as he stole between two defenders and tapped the ball past Bosnich, who thought it was running wide. Then Cafu laid on a pass for Romario to convert from close range.

Eight minutes after the break, Romario again took advantage of sloppy defending to score from Ronaldo's headed pass and Ronaldo completed his hat-trick by chesting down an outstanding long-range pass from captain Dunga, before thumping the ball home.

Romario's treble – and the rout– was completed from a penalty after Bosnich brought down Ronaldo.

EUROPE

UEFA CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

6th matchday (Dec 10)

GROUP A

Galatasaray 1 (Ilie 51)
Parma 1 (Chiesa 46)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Vagner (Hun)
Galatasaray: Volkan - Filipescu (Osman 85), Fatih, Bulent, Popescu, Ilie, Tugay, Ergun, Hagi, Hakan Sukur, Umit (Arif 67).
Parma: Buffon - Ze Maria (Mussi 71), Thuram, Apolloni, Milanese (Adailton 71), Stanic, Fiore, D Baggio, M Crippa, Maniero (Crespo 80), Chiesa.

Sparta Prague 0
Borussia Dortmund 3 (Moller 30, Kirovski 47, Booth 71)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 10,925. **Ref:** Dallas (Sc)
Sparta: Postulka - Votava, Svoboda, Novotny (Baranek 51), Hasek, Obaidin (Mistr 67), Nemecek, Cizek, Gabriel, Lokvenc, Stegl (Pospisil 76).
Dortmund: Klos - Kree, Feiersinger, Reuter, Reinhardt, Ricken (Mehnert 67), But (Timm 80), Freund, Moller (Booth 61), Kirovski, Herrlich.

GROUP B

Juventus 1 (Inzaghi 83)
Manchester United 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 47,786. **Ref:** Veissiere (Fr)
Juventus: Peruzzi - Ferrara, Iuliano, Birindelli (Dimas 75), Torricelli, Conte (Montero 65), Di Livio, Tacchinardi (Pecchia 46), Zidane, Fonseca, Inzaghi.
Man Utd: Schmeichel - Berg, Pallister, G Neville, P Neville, Beckham, Johnsen, Poborsky (McClair 79), Giggs, Sheringham, Solskjaer (Cole 74).

Kosice 0
Feyenoord 1 (Van Bronckhorst 81)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 2,500. **Ref:** Monteiro Coroado (Por)
Kosice: Molnar - Spilar, Kozak, Dzurik, Janocko (Bochnovic 85), Lyubarksy (Lapsansky 85), Toth, Kozelj, Semenik, Zvara, Sovic./
Feyenoord: Dudek - Boatang, Van Gastel, Van Wonderen, Sanchez (Korneev 67), Van Bronckhorst, Bosvelt, Van Gobbel, Connolly (Nelisse 46; Schuiteman 87), Vos, Zwijnenberg.

GROUP C

Newcastle United 2 (Barnes 10, Pearce 21)
Kiev Dynamo 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 33,694. **Ref:** Krug (Ger)
Newcastle: Hislop - Peacock, Pearce, Watson, Pistone (Hughes 46), Batty, Lee, Barnes, Albert, Gillespie, Asprilla (Ketsbaia 58).
Kiev: Shovkovsky - Luzhny, Bezhenar, Dmytrulin, Kalitvintsev, Kosovsky, Shevchenko, Rebrov, Gusin, Mykhailenko (Venglinsky 79), Volosianko (Radchenko 79).

PSV Eindhoven 2 (Jonk 54, De Bilde 56)
Barcelona 2 (Abelardo 32, Giovanni 67)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 30,000. **Ref:** Frisk (Swe)
PSV: Waterreus - Faber, Valckx, Numan, Stinga, Jonk (Van Ede 90), Cocu, De Bilde, Iwan, Zenden, Bruggink (Moller 46).
Barcelona: Hesp - Ferrer, Abelardo, Reiziger, Roger Garcia, Albert Celades (Amor 88), Guardiola (Fernando Couto 51), Rivaldo, Giovanni (Ciric 77), Luis Figo, Anderson.

GROUP D

Olympiakos 2 (Mavrogenidis 48, Djordjevic 88)
Rosenborg 2 (Rushfeldt 49, 69)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 25,000. **Ref:** Benko (Aus)
Olympiakos: Tochourglou - Karataidis, Dabizas, Anatolakis (Alexandris 65), Ivic, Djordjevic, Toursanidis, Mavrogenidis, Passalis, Georgatos (Yannakopoulos 65), Bandovic.
Rosenborg: Jamtfall - Bergdolmo, Hoftun, Bragstad, Strand, R Berg, Skammelsrud, Rushfeldt, Brattbakk, Jakobsen, Heggem.

Real Madrid 4 (Hierro 5, Suker 30, pen 73, Roberto Carlos 50)
FC Porto 0
HT: 2-0. **Att:** 70,000. **Ref:** Pairetto (It)
Madrid: Canizares - Hierro, Sanchis (Karanka 80), Roberto Carlos, Redondo, Raul (Guti 65), Suker, Seedorf, Amavisca, Morientes (Victor 73), Jaime Sanchez.
Porto: Rui Correra - Joao Manuel Pinto (Nuno Capucho 32), Paulinho Santos, Aloisio, Fernando Mendes, Barroso, Rui Barros, Folha (Jose Gaspar 32), Drulovic, Neves, Zahovic.

GROUP E

Bayern Munich 0
IFK Gothenburg 1 (Babbel og 51)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 27,000. **Ref:** Braschi (It)
Bayern: Kahn - Helmer (Nerlinger 21), Matthaus, Babbel, Fink, Zickler (Gerster 57), Hamann, Scholl, Tarnat, Jancker, Rizzitelli (Elber 57).
IFK: Ravelli - Magnus Johansson, Magnusson, Lucic, Erlingmark, M Nilsson, P Eriksson, P Karlsson, Martinsson (J Svensson 90), Ekstrom (Lundstrom 72), R Andersson (Tetteh 81).

Paris Saint-Germain 2 (Gava 24, Simone 59)
Besiktas 1 (Ozdilek Mehmet 38)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 34,038. **Ref:** Lopez Nieto (Sp)
Paris: Revault - Kelban, Le Guen, Ducroq, LLacer, Edmilson (Cisse 70), Leroy, Gava, Rai, Simone, Maurice.
Besiktas: Mrmic - Serdar (Lechkov 67), Alpay, Rahim, Tayfur, Recep, Mehmet, Yankov, Erkan, Amokachi (Osman 78), Otay (Ertugrul 72).

GROUP F

Bayer Leverkusen 2 (Beinlich 29, Meijer 57)
Monaco 2 (Pignol 63, Henry 81)
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 22,500. **Ref:** Collina (It)
Leverkusen: Heinen - R Kovac, Worns, Nowotny, N Kovac (Zivkovic 61), Kirsten (Rink 86), Meijer, Ramelow, Lehnhoff, Heintze, Beinlich.
Monaco: Barthez - Pignol, Djetou (Diao 9), Dumas, Collins (Henry 59), Ali Benarbia (Carnot 63), Trezeguet, Legwinski, Sagnol, Irles, Ikpeba.

Sporting Lisbon 2 (Cesar Ramirez 46, Bruno Gimenez 67)
Lierse 1 (Haagdoren 27)
HT: 0-1. **Att:** 13,000. **Ref:** Irvine (RI)
Sporting: De Wilde - Quim Berto, Marco Aurelio, Beto, Vinicius Silva, Pedro Martins (Carlos Miguel 46), Vidigal, Lang, Alfonso Martins (Bruno Gimenez 46), Cesar Ramirez, Leandro Machado (Iordanov 89).
Lierse: Deman - Hofkens, Van Meir, Serneels, Scavone, Zdebel, Brocken, Leen (Bovri 70), Haagdoren, Huistra (Cavens 74), Van de Weyer (Uwuigbe 82).

FINAL TABLES

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Borussia Dortmund	6	5	0	1	14	3	15
Parma	6	2	3	1	6	5	9
Sparta Prague	6	1	2	3	6	11	5
Galatasaray	6	1	1	4	4	11	4

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manchester Utd	6	5	0	1	14	5	15
Juventus	6	4	0	2	12	8	12
Feyenoord	6	3	0	3	8	10	9
Kosice	6	0	0	6	2	13	0

GROUP C

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kiev Dynamo	6	3	2	1	13	6	11
PSV Eindhoven	6	2	3	1	9	8	9
Newcastle United	6	2	1	3	7	8	7
Barcelona	6	1	2	3	7	14	5

GROUP D

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Real Madrid	6	4	1	1	15	4	13
Rosenborg Trond	6	3	2	1	13	8	11
Olympiakos	6	1	2	3	6	14	5
Porto	6	1	1	4	3	11	4

GROUP E

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bayern Munich	6	4	0	2	13	6	12
Paris St-Germain	6	4	0	2	11	10	12
Besiktas	6	2	0	4	6	9	6
IFK Gothenburg	6	2	0	4	4	9	6

GROUP F

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Monaco	6	4	1	1	15	8	13
Bayer Leverkusen	6	4	1	1	11	7	13
Sporting Lisbon	6	2	1	3	9	11	7
Lierse	6	0	1	5	3	12	1

In control...Bayern's Alexander Zickler evades the challenge of IFK Gothenburg

Leading scorers

6.....Henry (Monaco)
5.....Del Piero (Juventus), Shevchenko (Kiev), Rebrov (Kiev), Cole (Man Utd)

UEFA CUP

3rd rnd, 2nd legs

(Dec 9 unless stated)

Bochum 2 (Hofmann 59, Mamic 70)
Ajax 2 (Arveladze 51, Dani 73)
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 24,034 (Dec 10)
Ajax 6-4 on agg
Bochum: Ernst - Sundermann (Fahrenhorst 18), Kracht, Mamic, Reis, Peschel (Schreiber 67), Dickhaut, Hofmann, Wosz, Donkov (Michalke 46), Baluszynski.
Ajax: Van der Sar - Melchiot, Oliseh, Blind, F de Boer, R de Boer, Dani, Rudy (Stier 44), Laudrup (Litmanen 65), Babangida, Arveladze.

Aston Villa 2 (Milosevic 71, Taylor 85)
Steaua Bucharest 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 35,102. **Ref:** Heynemann (Ger)
Villa 3-2 on agg
Villa: Bosnich - Charles, Staunton, Southgate, Wright, Ehiogu, Taylor, Draper (Nelson 83), Milosevic, Collymore, Grayson (Hendrie 62).
Steaua: Ritli - Reghecampf, Csik, Rachita (Lincar 88), Matei, Miu, Rotariu, Militaru, Munteanu, Lacatus (Luca 68), Ciocoiu (Hrib 77).

Atletico Madrid 1 (Jose Luis Caminero 45)
Croatia Zagreb 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 30,000
Atletico Madrid 2-1 on agg

Auxerre 2 (Steve Marlet 3, Stephane Guivarc'h 82)
Twente Enschede 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 20,000
Auxerre 3-0 on agg

Internazionale 3 (Ronaldo 27, Javier Zanetti 48, Diego Simeone 73)
Strasbourg 0
HT: 1-0. **Att:** 36,000
Inter 3-2 on agg
Strasbourg: Dogon sent off, 81 min.

Lazio 1 (Giorgio Venturin 86)
Rapid Vienna 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 10,000
Lazio 3-0 on agg

Moscow Spartak 1 (Alexander Shirko 109)
Karlsruhe 0
HT: 0-0. **90min:** 0-0. **Att:** 28,000
Spartak 1-0 on agg, after extra time

Schalke 2 (Martin Max 46, Rene Eijkelkamp 63)
Braga 0
HT: 0-0. **Att:** 56,000
Schalke 2-0 on agg
Schalke: Lehmann - Thon, De Kock, Linke, Held (Andreas Muller 66), Nemec, Van Hoogdalem, Buskens, Wilmots (Anfang 77), Eijkelkamp (Kluzhev 81), Max.
Braga: Wozniak - *Jose Nuno, Abreu, Idalecio Rosa, Paulo Lino, Mozer (Rui Guerreiro 49), Bruno Ferreira, Rodrigao, Luis Baltasar (Antonio Formoso 68), Karoglan, Toni. *Jose Nuno sent off, 39min.*

QUARTER-FINAL DRAWS

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Bayer Leverkusen-Real Madrid
Juventus-Kiev Dynamo
Bayern Munich-Borussia Dortmund
Monaco-Manchester United
Ties to be played on March 4 and 18

CUP-WINNERS CUP

Roda JC-Vicenza
Slavia Prague-VfB Stuttgart
AEK Athens-Moscow Lokomotiv
Real Betis-Chelsea
Ties to be played on March 5 and 19

UEFA CUP

Ajax Amsterdam-Moscow Spartak
Internazionale-Schalke
Lazio-Auxerre
Atletico Madrid-Aston Villa
Ties to be played on March 3 and 17

ALBANIA

Nov 29: Flamurtari 2 Besa 0; Skenderbeu 1 Laci 1; Shkumbini 3 Bylis 0; Tirana 2 Teuta 0; Tomori 0 Partizani 2; Apolonia 2 Sopoti 2; Elbasani 2 Vllaznia 0; Albpetrol 1 Lushnja 0; Olimpik 0 Shqiponja 0.
Dec 6: Bylis 0 Tirana 0; Partizani5 Albpetrol 0; Sopoti 4 Skenderbeu 0; Lushnja 0 Olimpik 1; Shqiponja 3 Flamurtari 2; Vllaznia 3 Shkumbini 2; Laci 1 Elbasani 0; Teuta 3 Tomori 0; Besa 1 Apolonia 0.
Dec 13: Albpetrol 0 Besa 0; Tirana 1 Laci 0; Flamurtari 2 Teuta 0; Olimpik 0 Partizani 1; Bylis 5 Sopoti 0; Tomori 0 Vllaznia 1; Skenderbeu 3 Elbasani 0; Shkumbini 3 Lushnja 1; Apolonia 5 Shqiponja 2.
Dec 20: Partizani 8 Flamurtari 3; Besa 4 Bylis 1; Shqiponja 4 Tomori 0; Teuta 2 Shkumbini 1; Vllaznia 2 Skenderbeu 0; Laci 1 Olimpik 0; Elbasani 1 Albpetrol 0; Sopoti 0 Tirana 0; Lushnja 0 Apolonia 0.
Dec 27: Tomori 1 Besa 2; Apolonia 4 Laci 0; Skenderbeu 1 Teuta 0; Bylis 0 Partizani 1; Shkumbini 4 Sopoti 0; Olimpik 0 Vllaznia 1; Flamurtari 1 Elbasani 0; Tirana 0 Lushnja 1; Albpetrol 0 Shqiponja 2.

ALBANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Partizani	17	12	1	4	33	11	37
Vllaznia	17	12	1	4	20	14	37
Tirana	17	10	3	4	32	11	33
Shkumbini	17	9	2	6	33	20	29
Laci	17	9	2	6	25	14	29
Teuta	17	9	1	7	17	15	28
Elbasani	17	8	1	8	26	14	25
Apolonia	17	7	4	6	22	17	25
Flamurtari	17	7	3	7	24	21	24
Sopoti	17	7	3	7	23	30	24
Bylis	17	7	2	8	22	19	23
Skenderbeu	17	6	4	7	14	20	22
Tomori	17	6	2	9	17	27	20
Lushnja	17	5	4	8	18	23	19
Besa	17	5	3	9	23	26	18
Shqiponja	17	5	2	10	18	35	17
Olimpik	17	4	3	10	12	24	15
Albpetrol	17	3	3	11	8	46	12

AUSTRIA

Saturday, November 19

Lustenau 3 (Lipa 41, Koejoe 45, Dos Santos 77)
Austria Wien 1 (Simon 48) Att: 9,500

Linzer ASK 3 (Kauz 48, Pawlowski 65, Frigard 89)
Admira Wacker 5 (Slivovski 44, 84, Datoru 48, Ozegowic 74, Mraz 85) Att: 7,000

FC Tirol 2 (Mayrleb 29, Streiter 43)
Salzburg 1 (Glieder 1) Att: 5,000

Sturm Graz 4 (Hopfer 34, Haas 69, Spiteri 84, Popovic 90)
SV Ried 1 (Hansen 50) Att: 14,000

Rapid Wien 2 (Stumpf pen 28, Penksa 86)
Grazer AK 0 Att: 8,000

Wednesday, December 3

Admira Wacker 0
Rapid Wien 1 (Prosenik 78) Att: 4,000

AUSTRIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sturm Graz	21	15	5	1	50	13	50
Grazer AK	21	11	4	6	35	20	37
Rapid Wien	21	11	4	6	26	22	37
Linzer ASK	21	9	4	8	38	36	31
Salzburg	21	9	3	9	32	25	30
Aust.Wien	21	8	5	8	29	30	29
FC Tirol	21	8	4	9	30	31	28
SV Ried	21	5	6	10	19	32	21
Lustenau	21	4	7	10	23	36	19
Admira Wacker	21	3	2	16	18	55	11

LEADING SCORERS

1.....Mario Haas (Sturm Graz).....13
2.....Herfried Sabitzer (Grazer AK).....11
3.....Ivica Vastic (Sturm Graz).....10
.....Christian Mayrleb (FC Tirol).....10
.....Geir Frigaard (Linzer ASK).....10

BELGIUM

Saturday, November 29

Antwerp 1 (Godfroid 90)
Mouscron 2 (El Idrissi 41, Pierre 70) Att: 3,500

Beveren 1 (Smid pen 90)
Charleroi 0 Att: 2,300

Lierse 1 (Brocken 5)
Genk 2 (Kimoni 6, Gudjonsson 58) Att: 8,500

Lommel 0
Gent 1 (Nielsen 21) Att: 6,000

RWDM 1 (Sabbadini 15)
Standard 4 (Jaskulski pen 6, Huysmans 30, Hellers 40) Haeldermans 75) Att: 6,000

St Truiden 2 (Wuyts pen 14, Rudonja 89)
Eendracht Aalst 0 Att: 7,000

Westerlo 1 (Verstraeten og 74)
Ekeren 1 (Radzinski 71) Att: 4,000

Sunday, November 30

Club Brugge 2 (Claessens 9, Jankauskas 40)
Anderlecht 1 (Selymes 45) Att: 15,000

Harelbeke 3 (Visser 20, De Tollenaere 48, Visser 79)
Lokeren 2 (Koller 13, Penicka 68) Att: 4,000

Wednesday, December 3

Antwerp 0
Anderlecht 1 (Goor 58) Att: 4,000

Beveren 2 (Simba 12, 59)
Lierse 3 (Haagdoren 18, Zdebel 57, Eftevaag 68) Att: 3,500

Club Brugge 1 (Jbari 71)
Mouscron 0 Att: 10,500

St Truiden 2 (Verhoene 39, Rudonja 69)
Charleroi 0 Att: 5,500

Westerlo 2 (Janssen 23, 90)
Standard 0 Att: 8,000

Friday, December 5

Ekeren 0
Harelbeke 2 (Origi 41, Visser 66) Att: 3,000

Saturday, December 6

Anderlecht 1 (Arst 50)
Westerlo 0 Att: 20,709

Charleroi 2 (Gueye 8, Brogno 50)
Antwerp 1 (Pivaljevic 7) Att: 4,500

Gent 1 (Massagie 83)
Genk 2 (Delbroek 74, Gudjonsson 85) Att: 7,000

Lokeren 1 (Lisasi 90)
Beveren 2 (Torken 31, Dhont 69) Att: 6,000

Lommel 1 (Waligora 6)
St Truiden 1 (Dierickx 46) Att: 7,500

Standard 0
Lierse 0 Att: 10,000

Monday, December 7

Eendracht Aalst 1 (Lassen 58)
Club Brugge 4 (Jankauskas 4, 22, De Brul 63, Van Steenberghe og 88) Att: 9,000

Mouscron 4 (El Idrissi 9, 70, Vidovic pen 89, Vandooren 84)
Molenbeek 0 Att: 6,000

Saturday, December 13

Antwerp 1 (Americo 76)
Lokeren 2 (Schockaert 45, 57) Att: 3,000

Beveren 0
Ekeren 1 (Hofmans 56) Att: 4,000

Gent 1 (Herreman 59)
St Truiden 1 (Ljubobratovic 85) Att: 6,500

Lierse 2 (Huistra 10, Van de Weyer 89)
Mouscron 0 Att: 7,000

RWDM 1 (Baouf 65)
Charleroi 2 (Ouedraogo 8, Remy 16) Att: 4,000

Westerlo 0
Eendracht Aalst 3 (Meyssen 19, Lauwers 49, 87) Att: 5,000

Sunday, December 14

Club Brugge 2 (Verheyen 46, Fadiga 60)
Lommel 0 Att: 13,000

Genk 1 (Strupar 19)
Standard 1 (Jaskulski 41) Att: 14,700

Harelbeke 1 (Van Haezebrouck pen 70)
Anderlecht 1 (Goor 90) Att: 9,000

Wednesday, December 17

Antwerp 0
Club Brugge 1 (Jbari 21) **Att:** 5,000

Friday, December 19

Charleroi 3 (Gerard 29, Ouedraogo 30, Brogno pen 70)
Lierse 0 Att: 8,000

Saturday, December 20

Anderlecht 2 (De Boeck 1, Arst 16)
Beveren 0 Att: 18,000

Mouscron 0
Genk 2 (Oulare 47, pen 67) Att: 6,500

Lokeren 5 (Janssens 8, 43, Schockaert 41, Vanasek 56, Lisasi 84)
RWDM 0 Att: 2,500

Lommel 2 (Nassen 82, Bernbuana 89)
Westerlo 1 (Brogno 74) Att: 7,500

St Truiden 0
Club Brugge 2 (Jankauskas 4, Addo 70) Att: 13,500

Standard 3 (Van der Doelen 16, E. Mpenza 21, M. Mpenza 67)
Gent 3 (Foguenne 24, Van Handenhoven 28, Herreman 31) Att: 13,000

Sunday, December 21

Eendracht Aalst 3 (Lambo 57, 63, Lassen 83)
Harelbeke 2 (Zvingilas 15, Kubik 42) Att: 8,000

Ekeren 2 (Radzinski 13, Kovacs 20)
Antwerp 0 Att: 6,500

BELGIUM

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Club Brugge	16	14	2	0	44	10	44
Genk	17	10	3	4	38	22	33
Harelbeke	17	8	7	2	33	19	31
Germinal	17	9	3	5	27	21	30
Lommel	17	8	3	6	29	24	27
Anderlecht	17	8	3	6	23	19	27
Lierse	17	7	4	6	28	22	25
Lokeren	17	8	0	9	32	37	24
St Truiden	17	6	5	6	17	20	23
Charleroi	17	6	5	6	24	31	23
Gent	17	5	7	5	28	26	22
Een. Aalst	17	6	3	8	28	31	21
Westerlo	17	5	5	7	27	34	20
Standard	17	4	7	6	22	24	19
Mouscron	17	4	4	9	16	24	16
Beveren	17	3	5	9	17	28	14
Molenbeek	17	4	2	11	20	45	14
Antwerp	16	2	2	12	18	34	8

LEADING SCORERS

1.....Branko Strupar (Genk).....11
2.....Peter Larsson (Eendracht).....10
.....Souleymane Oulare (Genk).....10
4.....Piet Verschelde (Harelbeke).....8
.....Gert Claessens (Club Brugge).....8
.....Gert Verheyen (Club Brugge).....8
.....Hans Visser (Harelbeke).....8
.....Tomasz Radzinski (Germinal).....8

BELGIAN CUP

Ostende 2 Standard 0
Lommel 1 Club Brugge 1 *(aet, Lommel on pens)*
Charleroi 2 Mouscron 0
Westerlo 2 Anderlecht 1
Eendracht Aalst 2 Lokeren 2 *(aet, Lokeren on pens)*
Genk 1 St Truiden 1 *(aet, Genk on pens)*

CROATIA

Nov 30: Sibenik 1 Croatia 3; Hajduk 2 Samobor 1; Osijek 2 Rijeka 0; Varteks 2 Zadarkomerc 0; Mladost 127 1 Hrv. dragovoljac 0; Zagreb 2 Slaven Belupo 1.
Dec 7: Zagreb 4 Sibenik 1; Slaven Belupo 2 Mladost 127 0; Hrv. dragovoljac 0 Varteks 1; Zadarkomerc 2 Osijek 1; Rijeka 1 Hajduk 1.
Dec 14: Zagreb 0 Croatia 4.

CROATIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Hajduk Split	16	11	3	2	27	10	36
Zagreb	17	10	3	4	28	16	33
Croatia Zagreb	14	10	2	2	33	13	32
Hrv. dragovoljac	17	9	4	4	27	14	31
Osijek	17	7	4	6	25	21	25
Rijeka	17	4	9	4	18	20	21
Varteks	17	5	4	8	19	26	19
Slaven Belupo	17	5	3	9	15	32	18
Mladost 127	16	5	3	8	11	17	18
Zadarkomerc	17	5	2	10	19	21	17
Samobor	16	5	1	10	17	30	16
Sibenik	17	3	2	12	14	33	11

CYPRUS

Nov 29: AEK 1 Anorthosis; Omonia 1 APOEL 1; Ethnikos Achna 1 ENP 0; Evagoras 2 AEL 1; Apollon 2 APOP 1; Nea Salamis 3 Ethnikos Assia 1; Anagennisi 1 Alki 2.
Dec 13: Anorthosis 0 Ethnikos Achna 2; ENP 0 Apollon 1; APOP 2 Omonia 4; APOEL 2 Evagoras 0; Alki 3 Nea Salamis 2; AEL 3 Anagennisi 1; Ethnikos Assia 1 AEK 4.
Dec 20: Apollon 1 Anorthosis 1; Omonia 2 ENP 0; Anagennisi 1 APOEL 1; Evagoras 1 APOP 0; Ethnikos Assia 2 Alki 0.
Dec 21: AEK 0 Ethnikos Achna 1; Nea Salamis 1 AEL 3.

CYPRUS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Anorthosis	12	9	2	1	40	6	29
Omonia	12	9	1	2	39	8	28
Apollon	12	8	3	1	25	10	27
Ethnikos Achna	12	8	2	2	20	11	26
AEK	12	6	4	2	23	16	22
APOEL	12	5	4	3	22	15	19
AEL	12	4	3	5	19	25	15
Nea Salamis	12	5	0	7	19	28	15
ENP	12	3	1	8	13	25	10
Evagoras	12	2	4	6	11	24	10
Anagennisi	12	2	4	6	15	31	10
Alki	12	3	1	8	15	34	10
APOP	12	2	3	7	19	30	9
Ethnikos Assia	12	1	2	9	12	31	5

On target in Belgium...Brugge's Addo

CZECH REPUBLIC

Nov 30: Olomouc 1 Dukla 1; Plzen 0 Jablonec 0; Zizkov 1 Hradec Kralove 2; Budejovice 1 Brno 3; Bohdanec 2 Opava 2; Liberec 3 Drnovice 1; Slavia 2 Ostrava 1; Teplice 1 Sparta 1.

CZECH REPUBLIC

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sparta Prague	15	11	3	1	28	11	36
Slavia Prague	15	7	5	3	23	12	26
Boby Brno	15	7	3	5	26	19	24
Olomouc	15	7	3	5	17	12	24
Liberec	15	7	3	5	22	23	24
Drnovice	15	6	4	5	22	20	22
Ostrava	15	5	7	3	19	18	22
Jablonec	15	5	6	4	15	16	21
Teplice	15	4	7	4	16	11	19
Opava	15	4	7	4	20	21	19
Dukla	15	5	4	6	18	21	19
Hradec Kralove	15	5	4	6	14	20	19
Zizkov	15	4	4	7	15	16	16
Budejovice	15	4	4	7	17	21	16
Plzen	15	3	3	9	16	25	12
Bohdanec	15	2	1	12	8	30	7

ENGLAND

Monday, November 24

Tottenham 0
Crystal Palace 1 (Shipperley 57) Att: 25,634

Wednesday, November 26

Chelsea 2 (Wise pen 80, Zola pen 90)
Everton 0 Att: 34,148

Saturday, November 29

Barnsley 2 (Liddell 8, Ward 28)
Leeds 3 (Haaland 35, Wallace 79, Lilley 82) Att: 18,690

Bolton 1 (Blake 89)
Wimbledon 0 Att: 22,703

Chelsea 4 (Zola 12, 66, 77, M. Hughes 35)
Derby 0 Att: 34,544

Coventry 0
Leicester 2 (Fenton 32, Elliott pen 75) Att: 18,309

Crystal Palace 1 (Shipperley 67)
Newcastle 2 (Ketsbaia 45, Tomasson 63) Att: 26,085

Everton 0
Tottenham 2 (Vega 72, Ginola 76) Att: 36,670

Southampton 2 (Hirst 47, Palmer 55)
Sheffield Wed 3 (Atherton 28, Collins 69, Di Canio 84) Att: 15,244

West Ham 2 (Hartson 18, 48)
Aston Villa 1 (Yorke 47) Att: 24,976

Sunday, November 30

Arsenal 0
Liverpool 1 (McManaman 55) Att: 38,094

Man Utd 4 (Solskjaer 18, 53, Henchoz og 60, Kenna og 85)
Blackburn 0 Att: 55,175

Monday, December 1

Bolton 1 (Blake 22)
Newcastle 0 Att: 24,494

Wednesday, December 3

West Ham 4 (Hartson 31, Berkovitch 45, Unsworth 48, Lomas 71)
Crystal Palace 1 (Shipperley 42) Att: 23,335

Saturday, December 6

Aston Villa 3 (Collymore 21, Hendrie 71, Joachim 85)
Coventry 0 Att: 33,250

Blackburn 3 (Gallacher 4, Sutton 21, Wilcox 90)
Bolton 1 (Frandsen 84) Att: 25,503

Derby 2 (Miklosko og 10, Sturridge 49)
West Ham 0 Att: 29,300

Leeds 0
Everton 0 Att: 34,869

Leicester 1 (Izzet 90)
Crystal Palace 1 (Padovano 43) Att: 19,191

Liverpool 1 (Fowler pen 60)
Man Utd 3 (Cole 51, 74, Beckham 70) Att: 41,027

Newcastle 0
Arsenal 1 (Wright 36) Att: 36,751

Tottenham 1 (Vega 43)
Chelsea 6 (Flo 40, 63, 90, Di Matteo 48, Petrescu 59, Nicholls 78) Att: 28,476

Sunday, December 7

Wimbledon 1 (Earle 18)
Southampton 0 Att: 12,009

Monday, December 8

Sheffield Wed 2 (Stefanovic 19, Di Canio 88)
Barnsley 1 (Redfearn 29) Att: 29,086

Saturday, December 13

Arsenal 1 (Overmars 18)
Blackburn 3 (Wilcox 57, Gallacher 65, Sherwood 89) Att: 38,147

Barnsley 2 (Redfearn 9, Hendrie 75)
Newcastle 2 (Gillespie 44, 49) Att: 18,687

Chelsea 0
Leeds 0 Att: 34,690

Goal machine...Andy Cole, top scorer, with David Beckham

Coventry 4 (Huckerby 42, 84, Breen 63, Hall 87)
Tottenham 0 Att: 19,499

Crystal Palace 0
Liverpool 3 (McManaman 39, Owen 56, Leonhardsen 61) Att: 25,790

Everton 0
Wimbledon 0 Att: 28,533

Southampton 2 (Le Tissier 2, Benali 54)
Leicester 1 (Savage 84) Att: 15,121

West Ham 1 (Kitson 68)
Sheffield Wed 0 Att: 24,344

Sunday, December 14

Bolton 3 (Thompson 50, Blake 73, Pollock 77)
Derby 3 (Eranio 55, Baiano 64, 69) Att: 23,037

Monday, December 15

Manchester Utd 1 (Giggs 52)
Aston Villa 0 Att: 55,151

Wednesday, December 17

Newcastle 0
Derby 0 Att: 36,289

Saturday, December 20

Aston Villa 1 (Taylor 64)

Southampton 1 (Ostenstad 72) Att: 29,343

Blackburn 3 (Ripley 22, Duff 51, 72)
West Ham 0 Att: 21,653

Derby 0
Crystal Palace 0 Att: 26,590

Leeds 2 (Ribeiro 67, Hasselbaink 81)
Bolton 0 Att: 31,163

Leicester 0
Everton 1 (Speed pen 89) Att: 20,628

Liverpool 1 (Owen 14)
Coventry 0 Att: 39,707

Sheffield Wed 1 (Pembridge 71)
Chelsea 4 (Petrescu 30, Vialli 56, Leboeuf pen 65, Flo 84) Att: 28,334

Tottenham 3 (Nielsen 6, Ginola 12, 18)
Barnsley 0 Att: 28,232

Sunday, December 21

Newcastle 0
Manchester Utd 1 (Cole 66) Att: 36,767

Monday, December 22

Wimbledon 0
Arsenal 0
Abandoned due to floodlight failure in the 46th min

Friday, December 26

Arsenal 2 (Platt 36, Walsh og 56)
Leicester 1 (Lennon 77) Att: 38,023

Aston Villa 4 (Draper 38, 68, Collymore 81, 89)
Tottenham 1 (Calderwood 59) Att: 38,644

Bolton 1 (Bergsson 38)
Barnsley 1 (Hristov 20) Att: 25,000

Chelsea 1 (Vialli 8)
Wimbledon 1 (Hughes 28) Att: 34,100

Crystal Palace 1 (Shipperley 62)
Southampton 1 (Oakley 39) Att: 22,853

Derby 1 (Eranio pen 4)
Newcastle 0 Att: 30,232

Liverpool 3 (Owen 46, Fowler 79, 83)
Leeds 1 (Haaland 84) Att: 43,854

Manchester Utd 2 (Berg 14, Cole 35)
Everton 0 Att: 55,167

Sheffield Wed 0
Blackburn 0 Att: 33,502

West Ham 1 (Kitson 17)
Coventry 0 Att: 24,532

ENGLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Manchester Utd	21	14	4	3	49	16	46
Blackburn	21	11	8	2	38	21	41
Chelsea	21	12	3	6	46	21	39
Liverpool	20	11	4	5	36	19	37
Arsenal	21	9	8	4	35	23	35
Leeds	21	10	5	6	30	23	35
Derby	21	9	5	7	34	28	32
West Ham	21	10	1	10	28	32	31
Leicester	21	7	7	7	25	21	28
Aston Villa	21	7	5	9	25	27	26
Newcastle	20	7	5	8	21	25	26
Wimbledon	21	6	7	8	21	24	25
Southampton	21	7	3	11	25	30	24
Coventry	21	5	8	8	20	28	23
Crystal Palace	21	5	8	8	20	28	23
Sheffield Wed	21	6	5	10	32	44	23
Bolton	21	4	9	8	19	33	21
Everton	21	5	5	11	20	31	20
Tottenham	21	5	5	11	19	37	20
Barnsley	21	5	3	13	19	51	18

LEADING SCORERS

1 .....Andy Cole (Man Utd).....12
.....Chris Sutton (Blackburn).....12
3 .....John Hartson (West Ham).....11
.....Francesco Baiano (Derby Co).....11
5 .....Dennis Bergkamp (Arsenal).....10
.....Ian Wright (Arsenal).....10
.....Kevin Gallacher (Blackburn).....10

FRANCE

Saturday, November 29

Chateauroux 0
Monaco 2 (Ikpeba 35, 81) Att: 16,000

Guingamp 0
Bastia 0 Att: 9,340

Lens 3 (Smicer 3, Ziani 9, Raschke og 77)
Strasbourg 2 (Collet 17, Nouma 88) Att: 20,620

Montpellier 1 (Alicarte pen 59)
Le Havre 1 (Prat 53) Att: 9,088

Nantes 1 (Gourvennec 55)
Marseille 0 Att: 32,103

Lyon 3 (Bravo 9, Kanoute 37, 87)
Rennes 1 (Gregoire 66) Att: 19,643

Toulouse 1 (Moreau 31)
Cannes 0 Att: 11,172

Sunday, November 30

Bordeaux 2 (Laslandes 45, 60)
Metz 2 (Pires 6, Histiloles 67) Att: 18,000

Paris SG 1 (Danjou og 90)
Auxerre 0 Att: 38,678

Friday, December 5

Auxerre 3 (Guivarc'h 43, 65, Diomede 76)
Nantes 1 (Carriere 90) Att: 10,000

Cannes 0
Paris SG 1 (Rai 87) Att: 5,000

Le Havre 0
Lens 1 (Vairelles 67) Att: 9,000

Metz 2 (Rodriguez 27, Pires 40)
Chateauroux 0 Att: 12,000

Monaco 2 (Djetou 70, Trezeguet 84)
Lyon 1 (Kanoute 20) Att: 3,000

Rennes 0
Bordeaux 0 Att: 9,000

Strasbourg 0
Guingamp 1 (Moreira 37) Att: 6,000

Sunday, December 7

Bastia 0
Toulouse 0 Att: 6,000

Marseille 0
Montpellier 0 Att: 25,000

Saturday, December 13

Chateauroux 1 (Dufresne 56)
Bastia 1 (Andre 40) Att: 11,000

Bordeaux 0
Cannes 1 (Vanenburg pen 34) Att: 15,000

Guingamp 1 (Moreira 4)
Auxerre 1 (Guivarc'h 3) Att: 7,000

Lens 0
Marseille 1 (Gravelaine 9) Att: 39,000

Nantes 2 (N'Diaye 2, Giallanza 59)
Strasbourg 1 (Okpara 69) Att: 21,682

Lyon 0
Le Havre 1 (Becanovic 79) Att: 20,000

Toulouse 1 (Moreau 36)
Montpellier 1 (Sanchez 86) Att: 8,202

Sunday, December 14

Monaco 1 (Henry 54)
Rennes 0 Att: 8,000

Paris SG 1 (Rai pen 62)
Metz 1 (Pires 69) Att: 38,000

Thursday, December 18

Le Havre 1 (Soloy 70)
Nantes 0 Att: 11,448

Metz 3 (Gaillot 24, Rodriguez pen 65, Boffin 75)
Monaco 0 Att: 14,605

Friday, December 19

Auxerre 4 (Deniaud 16, 44, Guivarc'h pen 56, 84)
Bordeaux 2 (Zanotti 33, Papin pen 65) Att: 15,000

Bastia 0
Lyon 1 (Bravo 55) Att: 2,000

Montpellier 1 (Garny 85)
Lens 2 (Foe 74, Debeve 79) Att: 9,200

Rennes 1 (Gousse 63)
Paris SG 2 (Rabesandratana 44, Algerino 81) Att: 13,000

Strasbourg 2 (Miceli 25, Baticle 72)
Toulouse 0 Att: 6,000

FRANCE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Metz	21	12	6	3	34	18	42
PSG	21	12	5	4	34	18	41
Monaco	21	13	2	6	34	21	41
Marseille	20	11	4	5	26	14	37
Lens	21	11	4	6	30	24	37
Auxerre	21	10	3	8	36	29	33
Bordeaux	21	8	8	5	26	24	32
Bastia	21	7	8	6	22	17	29
Lyon	21	9	2	10	24	24	29
Toulouse	21	6	7	8	18	26	25
Montpellier	21	5	9	7	20	23	24
Guingamp	20	6	6	8	19	23	24
Nantes	21	6	5	10	20	26	23
Le Havre	21	4	10	7	19	23	22
Strasbourg	21	5	6	10	22	29	21
Chateauroux	20	5	4	11	18	32	19
Rennes	21	4	5	12	21	35	17
Cannes	20	5	2	13	19	36	17

LEADING SCORERS

1 .....Stephane Guivarc'h (Auxerre).....15
2 .....Victor Ikpeba (Monaco).....12
3 .....Lilian Laslandes (Bordeaux).....10
.....David Trezeguet (Monaco).....10
.....Robert Pires (Metz).....10

GERMANY

Friday, November 28

Duisburg 0
Hertha 1 (Preetz 22) Att: 10,227

Karlsruhe 3 (Regis 22, Gilewicz 46, Dundee 79)
Hansa Rostock 0 Att: 19,000

Saturday, November 29

Arminia Bielefeld 1 (Reina 70)
Schalke 1 (Max 83) Att: 22,512

Borussia MG 0
Wolfsburg 2 (Kovacevic 24, Prager 28) Att: 21,300

Kaiserslautern 2 (Ratinho 75, Hristov 90)
Hamburg 1 (Salihamidzic 59) Att: 38,000

1860 Munich 0
Bochum 2 (Peschel 5, Reis 15) Att: 24,700

Werder Bremen 2 (Frings 61, Brand 69)
Stuttgart 2 (Balakov pen 84, 89) Att: 29,200

Sunday, November 30

Bayer Leverkusen 4 (Heintze 45, Kirsten 69, 90, 90)
Bayern Munich 2 (Elber 6, Jancker 24) Att: 22,500

Friday, December 5

Kaiserslautern 2 (Hamann og 45, Hristov 85)
Bayern Munich 0 Att: 38,000

Saturday, December 6

Arminia Bielefeld 0
Bochum 2 (Mamic 70, Wosz 86) Att: 18,441

Bayer Leverkusen 0
Schalke 0 Att: 22,500

Borussia MG 1 (Klinkert 16)
Hamburg 1 (Sporl 68) Att: 21,000

Duisburg 2 (Komljenovic 2, Hirsch 71)

Koln 2 (Azizi 44, Rytchkov 80) Att: 11,163

Munich 1860 1 (Winkler 10)
Stuttgart 3 (Raduciolu 63, Gorges og 65, Akpoborie 89) Att: 24,500

Werder Bremen 2 (Bode 17, Frings 37)
Karlsruhe 4 (Schroth 7, 56, 85, Schepens 87) Att: 23,500

Sunday, December 7

Wolfsburg 1 (Prager 55)
Hansa Rostock 1 (Barbarez pen 74) Att: 17,854

Friday, December 12

Hansa Rostock 1 (Rehmer 11)
Werder Bremen 2 (Bode 13, 53) Att: 12,500

Hertha 2 (Karl 3, Preetz 71)
Kaiserslautern 0 Att: 61,445

Saturday, December 13

Bayern Munich 3 (Jancker 20, 50, Nerlinger 52)
Borussia MG 2 (Effenberg 63, Petterson 87) Att: 46,000

Hamburg 1 (Schnoor 87)
Wolfsburg 2 (Reyna 37, Prager 71) Att: 18,000

Karlsruhe 0
1860 Munich 0 Att: 22,500

Koln 4 (Polster 7, 17, 76, Azizi 62)
Borussia Dortmund 2 (Herrlich 20, Chapuisat 50) Att: 33,000

Schalke 1 (De Kock 5)
Duisburg 1 (Osthoff 30) Att: 37,390

Stuttgart 1 (Balakov 81)
Arminia Bielefeld 0 Att: 38,000

Sunday, December 14

Bochum 0
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 22,009

Tuesday, December 16

Borussia Dortmund 3 (Herrlich 3, Moller pen 17, 73)
Hertha 0 Att: 51,000

Friday, December 19

Borussia Dortmund 2 (But 26, Moller 79)
Schalke 2 (Kljoejev 75, Lehmann 90) Att: 55,000

Borussia MG 4 (Klinkert 11, Pflipsen 37, Effenberg 69, P. Pedersen 80)
Hertha 2 (Covic 5, Preetz 7) Att: 20,100

Saturday, December 20

Arminia Bielefeld 2 (Bagheri 58, Daei 88)
Karlsruhe 1 (Reich 36) Att: 22,512

Bayer Leverkusen 6 (Beinlich 2, 19, Rink 15, 79, Lehnhoff 76)
Stuttgart 1 (Bobic 34) Att: 22,500

Duisburg 2 (Salou 50, 70)
Bochum 0 Att: 15,000

Kaiserslautern 3 (Hristov 25, Riedl 59, Schjonberg 82)
Koln 2 (Munteanu 45, Polster 75) Att: 38,000

1860 Munich 0
Werder Bremen 1 (Maximov 57) Att: 24,500

Wolfsburg 2 (Reyna 45, Dammeier 47)
Bayern Munich 3 (Scholl 5, Jancker 26, Kuffour 79) Att: 21,600

Sunday, December 21

Hamburg 0
Hansa Rostock 1 (Barbarez 14) Att: 24,093

LEADING SCORERS

1 .....Ulf Kirsten (Leverkusen).....14
2 .....Olaf Marschall (Kaiserslautern).....13
3 .....Bernhard Winkler (Munich 1860).....10
.....Fredi Bobic (Stuttgart).....10
.....Krassimir Balakov (Stuttgart).....10
.....Carsten Jancker (Bayern Munich).....10
.....Roy Praeger (Wolfsburg).....10

GERMANY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Kaiserslautern	20	14	3	3	42	25	45
Bayern Munich	20	12	5	3	43	25	41
Stuttgart	20	10	5	5	40	28	35
Leverkusen	20	9	7	4	40	23	34
Schalke	20	8	8	4	23	18	32
Hansa Rostock	20	8	4	8	30	27	28
Duisburg	20	8	4	8	25	25	28
Werder Bremen	20	8	4	8	24	30	28
Wolfsburg	20	8	3	9	27	30	27
Dortmund	20	6	7	7	33	30	25
Hertha Berlin	20	7	4	9	25	33	25
Karlsruhe	20	6	6	8	32	38	24
Borussia MG	20	5	7	8	34	38	22
Bielefeld	20	7	1	12	25	32	22
Munich1860	20	5	6	9	22	34	21
Hamburg	20	5	5	10	25	32	20
Bochum	20	5	5	10	23	32	20
Koln	20	6	2	12	32	45	20

GERMAN CUP – 3RD RND

Tuesday, December 2

Duisburg 1 Eintracht Frankfurt 0
Hannover 96 1 CZ Jena 1
(aet, CZ Jena on pens)
SSV Ulm 1846 1 Stuttgart 3

Wednesday, December 3

Al.Aachen 1 Waldhof M 1
(aet, Waldhof Mannheim on pens)
Bayer Leverkusen 1 Arminia Bielefeld 1
(aet, Bayer Leverkusen on pens)
Meppen 0 Uerdingen 2

GERMAN CUP – QUARTER-FINALS

Tuesday, December 16

Carl Zeiss 1 (Gerstner pen 78)
Duisburg 2 (Osthoff 24, 74) Att: 4,580

Entr. Trier 1 (Fengler 49)
Waldhof 0 Att: 7,500

Uerdingen 0
Stuttgart 4 (Akpoborie 19, Bobic 50, 52, Hagner 90) Att: 8,784

Wednesday, December 17

Bayern Munich 2 (Nerlingerr 42, Elber 75)
Bayer Leverkusen 0 Att: 12,000

GREECE

Nov 29: Veria 1 AEK 2; Iraklis 2 Kalamata 1.
Nov 30: Ethnikos 1 Athinaikos 0; Kavala 2 Ionikos 3; Panahaiki 0 OFI 2; Proodeftiki 0 Paniliakos 1; Apollon 1 Xanthi 2; Panionios 0 PAOK 3.
Dec 1: Olympiakos 3 Panathinaikos 1.
Dec 6: Paniliakos 1 Olympiakos 1.
Dec 7: Kalamata 2 Athinaikos 0; Ionikos 1 Iraklis 0; AEK 2 Ethnikos 1; Panathinaikos 4 Kavala 1; OFI 3 Veria 0; Panionios 4 Proodeftiki 0; PAOK 1 Apollon 0.
Dec 8: Xanthi 0 Panahaiki 1.
Dec 13: Panahaiki 1 PAOK 4.
Dec 14: Iraklis 0 Panathinaikos 1; Ethnikos 0 OFI 1; Kavala 1 Paniliakos 1; Veria 2 Xanthi 1; Olympiakos 2 Panionios 0; Apollon 1 Proodeftiki 0.
Dec 15: Athinaikos 0 AEK 1.

GREECE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
AEK	14	12	1	1	30	13	37
Olympiakos	14	11	1	2	34	12	34
Panathinaikos	14	11	0	3	33	10	33
Ionikos	13	10	0	3	26	10	30
PAOK	14	8	4	2	28	15	28
Iraklis	14	7	2	5	18	17	23
OFI	14	7	2	5	22	25	23
Apollon	14	6	2	6	16	15	20
Xanthi	14	6	2	6	27	27	20
Paniliakos	14	5	2	7	22	26	17
Panionios	14	5	1	8	16	20	16
Veria	14	4	1	9	16	23	13
Ethnikos	14	4	1	9	7	16	13
Panahaiki	14	5	1	8	14	26	13
Proodeftiki	14	3	3	8	12	27	12
Kavala	14	2	3	9	20	30	9
Kalamata	13	2	2	9	7	21	8
Athinaikos	14	2	2	10	8	23	8

Fighting back...PSV beat Ajax in a 4-3 thriller

HOLLAND

Thursday, November 27

RKC 1 (Nielsen 28)
NAC 0 Att: 4,330

Volendam 3 (Schulp 15, Boogers 22, Valk 70)
Groningen 1 (Rosen 17) Att: 2,500

Ajax 2 (Oliseh 78, Arveladze 86)
Fortuna 0 Att: 48,200

Graafschap 3 (Lindenberg 45, Viscaal 62, Hesp 77)
NEC 2 (Schultz 37, Van Eijkeren 41) Att: 7,300

Sparta 0
Feyenoord 3 (Van Bronckhorst 4, Cruz 21, 85)
Att: 11,000

Twente 1 (Bosman 82)
Volendam 1 (Valk 81) Att: 7,200

Utrecht 1 (Robbemond 81)
Roda JC 0 Att: 11,011

Vitesse 2 (Machlas 62, 85)
PSV 2 (Nilis 14, De Bilde 37) Att: 9,846

Willem II 2 (Wijnhard 29, Kolkka 59)
NAC 0 Att: 9,500

Tuesday, December 2

Groningen 0
Heerenveen 1 (Elkhattabi 73) Att: 15,000

Wednesday, December 3

MVV 0
Ajax 3 (Laudrup 14, Babangida 52, F de Boer 54) Att: 10,000

NAC 1 (Milicic 83)
Roda JC 0 Att: 11,110

RKC 1 (Van Arum 9)
Sparta 3 (Jaliens 6, Mghizrat 29, Van der Laan 31)
Att: 3,480

Fortuna 3 (Hamming 25, 38, 71)
Volendam 0 Att: 4,800

NEC 0
Willem II 3 (Wijnhard 11, Sanou 17, 75) Att: 3,160

Saturday, December 6

Ajax 1 (Babangida 11)
Roda JC 0 Att: 49,800

Fortuna 1 (Hamming 18)
Twente 0 Att: 5,000

Heerenveen 0
De Graafschap 0 Att: 13,670

NAC 1 (Gerard de Nooijer 68)
Sparta 2 (Jaliens 47, Dennis de Nooijer 49)
Att: 11,575

Sunday, December 7

Groningen 2 (Bombarda 31, 48)
MVV 3 (Taiwo 11, Luypers 23, Nygaard 25)
Att: 11,000

NEC 3 (Hesp 14, Van Eijkeren 43, Lok 76)
Feyenoord 2 (Nelisse 20, Van Gastel 48) Att: 5,273

Utrecht 5 (Mols 31, 62, Van Nieuwkerk 67, 79, Robbemond 71)
Vitesse 3 (Reuser 28, Perovic 34, Machlas 80)
Att: 12,500

Willem II 4 (Wijnhard 24, 73, Sanou 33, Arts 89)
PSV 1 (De Bilde 19) Att: 12,000

Friday, December 12

Roda JC 3 (Torma 3, 25, Lawal 72)
MVV 0 Att: 7,000

Sparta 4 (Dennis de Nooijer 23, 32, Den Dunnen 37, 53)
Willem II 1 (Galasek 47) Att: 5,500

Saturday, December 13

Heerenveen 3 (Samardzic 57, 63, Van Nistelrooy 84)
Vitesse 2 (Machlas 17, Curovic 45) Att: 13,870

Sunday, December 14

Feyeenord 2 (Connolly 69, Van Gobbel 85)
Twente 2 (Van Halst 33, Vennegoor 73) Att: 25,718

Groningen 1 (Bombarda 23)
NAC 1 (Milicic 84) Att: 13,101

RKC 1 (Nielsen 75)
Fortuna 2 (Van Bommel 64, Jeffrey 69) Att: 3,970

Volendam 0
Ajax 3 (Litmanen 38, 68, Frank de Boer 62)
Att: 7,500

Friday, December 19

Fortuna 1 (Kool 66)
Roda JC 1 (Torma 19) Att: 7,500

Saturday, December 20

De Graafschap 2 (Vreman 48, Gerritsen 90)
Groningen 3 (Atteveld 16, Magno 79, Bombarda 89)
Att: 7,800

MVV 0
Utrecht 0 Att: 5,500

NEC 2 (Janssen 64, Van Eijkeren 76)
Sparta 0 Att: 3,781

Sunday, December 21

Ajax 3 (Arveladze 16, Gorre 54, Hoekstra 86)
PSV 4 (Bruggink 45, 53, De Bilde 47, Zenden 62)
Att: 51,000

Feyenoord 4 (Bosvelt 31, Cruz 49, 55, Van Gastel 86)
Willem II 2 (Wijnhard 50, 66) Att: 23,177

Vitesse 2 (Perovic 27, Curovic 52)
Twente 1 (Bosman 6) Att: 8,229

Volendam 0
NAC 3 (Arveladze 1, 71, Stewart 57) Att: 3,500

HOLLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Ajax	20	18	1	1	62	8	55
PSV	19	11	7	1	56	24	40
Vitesse	20	11	5	4	50	33	38
Feyenoord	20	10	5	5	35	25	35
Heerenveen	19	10	5	4	31	23	35
Willem II	20	9	3	8	35	31	30
Sparta	20	7	6	7	37	35	27
Fortuna	20	8	3	9	27	36	27
NAC	20	7	4	9	24	25	25
NEC	20	8	1	11	24	40	25
Utrecht	18	7	3	8	34	39	24
Roda JC	20	6	5	9	27	27	23
Twente	19	5	7	7	22	25	22
De Graafschap	20	5	6	9	24	22	21
Groningen	20	4	7	9	26	37	19
MVV	20	5	3	12	19	47	18
RKC	19	3	6	10	23	40	15
Volendam	20	2	5	13	13	52	11

LEADING SCORERS

1 .....Nikos Mahlas (Vitesse).....22
2 .....Ronald Hamming (Fortuna).....13
3 .....Gilles de Bilde (PSV).....12
4 .....Shota Arveladze (Ajax).....10
.....Jari Litmanen (Ajax).....10
.....Dennis De Nooijer (Sparta).....10

HUNGARY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Gyori	17	11	5	1	25	11	38
Ujpesti	17	11	3	3	32	16	36
MTK	17	10	3	4	35	18	33
Vasas	17	10	2	5	34	26	32
Ferencvaros	17	9	4	4	31	21	31
Diosgyori	17	8	3	6	25	15	27
Vaci	17	8	3	6	25	29	27
Debreceni	17	7	4	6	26	20	25
BVSC	17	6	6	5	24	23	24
Gazszer	17	4	9	4	27	20	21
Zalaegerszegi	17	6	3	8	30	27	21
Videoton	17	5	5	7	27	23	20
Haladas	17	5	4	8	24	27	19
Siooki Banyasz	17	5	2	10	17	23	17
Tiszakecske	17	4	4	9	23	43	16
Bekescsaba	17	4	4	9	12	34	16
Kispest-Honved	17	4	1	12	15	32	13
Stadler	17	1	5	11	11	35	8

ISRAEL

Dec 6: Bnei Yehuda 0 Betar Jerusalem 1; H Tel Aviv 0 H Beersheba 0; M Haifa 2 H Haifa 4; M Herzliya 3 H Petah Tikva 1; M Petah Tikva 0 M Ashdod 0; H Jerusalem 2 H Rishon Lezion 1; H Ashkelon 0 H Kfar Sava 1; H Beit She'an 0 M Tel Aviv 1.
Dec 13: H Kfar Sava 2 M Ashdod 2; M Tel Aviv 0 M Petah Tikva 1; Betar Jerusalem 5 H Beit She'an 2; H Haifa 1 Bnei Yehuda 0; H Rishon Lezion 1 M Haifa 2; H Beersheba 1 H Jerusalem 1; H Ashkelon 0 M Herzliya 0; H Petah Tikva 0 H Tel Aviv 1.
Dec 20: M Herzliya 1 H Kfar Sava 1; H Tel Aviv 1 H Ashkelon 0; H Jerusalem 0 H Petah Tikva 1; M Haifa 2 H Beersheba 0; Bnei Yehuda 0 H Rishon Lezion 1; H Beit She'an 1 H Haifa 1; M Petah Tikva 0 Betar Jerusalem 1; M Ashdod 1 M Tel Aviv 2.

ISRAEL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Betar Jerusalem	15	9	6	0	36	16	33
H Tel Aviv	15	9	5	1	15	6	32
H Haifa	15	8	5	2	26	15	29
M Haifa	15	8	3	4	27	17	27
H Petah Tikva	15	8	3	4	23	17	27
M Ashdod	15	5	7	3	21	19	22
H Kfar Sava	15	6	3	6	19	20	21
H Jerusalem	15	5	6	4	18	19	21
M Herzliya	15	4	6	5	20	19	18
H Rishon Lezion	15	4	5	6	18	22	17
M Tel Aviv	15	4	4	7	16	19	16
M Petah Tikva	15	3	7	5	10	14	16
H Ashkelon	15	3	3	9	13	24	12
Bnei Yehuda	15	2	5	8	12	20	11
H Beit She'an	15	2	5	8	13	24	11
H Beersheba	15	1	5	9	15	31	8

ITALY

Sunday, November 30

Atalanta 0
Lecce 0 Att: 15,539

Bari 2 (Volpi 9, Guerrero 46)
Brescia 1 (Hubner pen 70) Att: 16,000

Bologna 2 (Baggio pen 15, Paramatti 45)
Sampdoria 2 (Laigle 57, Klinsmann 76) Att: 29,074

Empoli 2 (Esposito 14, Bettella 43)
Piacenza 3 (Dionigi 7, 38, Buso 88) Att: 8,541

Lazio 2 (Fuser 31, Negro 41)
Udinese 3 (Poggi 32, Cappioli 73, Amoroso 84)
Att: 38,249

Milan 1 (Ferrara og 27)
Juventus 1 (Inzaghi 32) Att: 81,267

Napoli 1 (Turini 34)
Fiorentina 1 (Firicano 28) Att: 31,535

Parma 0
Roma 2 (Totti 9, Sergio 22) Att: 23,844

Vicenza 1 (Ambrosini 59)
Inter 3 (Simeone 33, 39, Ronaldo 68) Att: 19,744

Saturday, December 6

Juventus 2 (Del Piero 15, pen 34)
Lazio 1 (Marcolin pen 26) Att: 42,692

Sampdoria 1 (Montella pen 31)
Inter 1 (Ronaldo 9) Att: 35,375

Sunday, December 7

Brescia 3 (Pirlo 32, Adani 64, Banin 69)
Empoli 1 (Florijancic 66) Att: 9,413

Fiorentina 1 (Morfeo 58)
Parma 1 (Apolloni 54) Att: 32,190

Lecce 0
Vicenza 1 (Luiso 81) Att: 7,295

Milan 2 (Boban 47, Kluivert 62)
Bari 0 Att: 47,570

Piacenza 1 (Rastelli 87)
Napoli 0 Att: 10,903

Roma 3 (Carrera og 23, Totti 27, Sergio 32)
Atalanta 0 Att: 53,703

Udinese 4 (Bierhoff 13, 81, Amoroso 36, Poggi 67)
Bologna 3 (Andersson 27, Nervo 42, Kolyvanov 85)
Att: 23,883

Sunday, December 14

Atalanta 1 (Sgro 17)
Milan 2 (Lucarelli og 2, Kluivert 58) Att: 20,925

Bari 0
Udinese 0 Att: 17,145

Bologna 2 (Cristallini 20, Kolyvanov 87)
Lecce 0 Att: 30,616

Empoli 4 (Tonetto 25, Martusciello 40, 54, Esposito 65)
Sampdoria 1 (Franceschetti 9) Att: 7,740

Inter 3 (Djorkaeff pen 40, Branca 49, Petruzzi og 71)
Roma 0 Att: 65,846

Lazio 1 (Boksic 27)
Brescia 0 Att: 35,064

Napoli 0
Parma 4 (Blomqvist 18, Baggio 53, Crespo 65, 73)
Att: 30,919

Piacenza 1 (Piovani 80)
Juventus 1 (Fonseca 78) Att: 18,411

Vicenza 1 (Di Napoli 81)
Fiorentina 5 (Oliveira 7, 54, Batistuta 43, Serena 59, Schwarz 65) Att: 16,076

Sunday, December 21

Bari 0
Piacenza 0 Att: 16,301

Brescia 1 (Hubner 15)
Roma 1 (Sergio 90) Att: 11,311

Fiorentina 5 (Padalino 27, Serena 48, Oliveira 77, Batistuta 84, Robbiati 90)
Atalanta 0 Att: 30,236

Juventus 5 (Inzaghi 15, Del Piero 16, 27, 55, Tonetto og 79)
Empoli 2 (Florijancic 41, Esposito pen 74) Att: 41,818

Lazio 4 (Casiraghi 7, Fuser 63, Venturin 70, Boksic 90)
Vicenza 0 Att: 37,201

Milan 0
Bologna 0 Att: 47,889

Parma 2 (Baggio 55, Chiesa 62)
Lecce 1 (Rossi 71) Att: 19,737

Sampdoria 6 (Boghossian 35, Montella pen 42, 61, pen 91, Klinsmann 73, Laigle 76)
Napoli 3 (Bellucci 15, Protti 70, Rossitto 78) Att: 21,496

Udinese 1 (Bierhoff 90)
Inter 0 Att: 29,123

ITALY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Inter	14	10	3	1	30	13	33
Juventus	14	8	5	1	31	12	29
Udinese	14	9	2	3	28	23	29
Parma	14	7	5	2	25	11	26
Roma	14	6	5	3	25	16	23
Milan	14	6	5	3	19	13	23
Lazio	14	6	4	4	22	14	22
Fiorentina	14	5	6	3	30	16	21
Sampdoria	14	5	5	4	25	26	20
Vicenza	14	5	3	6	18	28	18
Bologna	14	3	6	5	22	23	15
Bari	14	4	3	7	12	23	15
Brescia	14	4	2	8	18	24	14
Empoli	14	4	2	8	21	28	14
Piacenza	14	2	7	5	12	19	13
Atalanta	14	3	3	8	14	25	12
Lecce	14	3	2	9	12	26	11
Napoli	14	1	2	11	12	36	5

LEADING SCORERS

1 .....Gabriel Batistuta (Fiorentina) 13
2 .....Oliver Bierhoff (Udinese) 11
3 .....Roberto Baggio (Bologna) 10
.....Vincenzo Montella (Sampdoria).....10
.....Alessandro Del Piero (Juventus) 10

LUXEMBOURG

Nov 30: Spora 1 Jeunesse 5; Dudelange 2 Wiltz 1; Mertzig 1 Avenir 3; Red Boys 1 Hobscheid 1; Grevenmacher 5 Rumelange 1; Union 2 Petange 0.
Dec 7: Spora 0 Hobscheid 2; Mertzig 2 Jeunesse 5; Union 3 Wiltz 2; Red Boys 0 Petange 1; Dudelange 0 Rumelange 0; Grevenmacher 0 Avenir 3.

LUXEMBOURG

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Union	12	10	2	0	36	10	32
Grevenmacher	12	8	2	2	27	12	26
Jeunesse	12	7	3	2	40	14	24
Dudelange	12	6	4	2	26	15	22
Avenir	12	6	2	4	25	23	20
Hobscheid	12	5	3	4	21	15	18
Wiltz	12	4	4	4	22	21	16
Petange	12	3	4	5	18	24	13
Mertzig	12	3	3	6	16	22	12
Spora	12	2	1	9	18	38	7
Rumelange	12	1	3	8	10	44	6
Red Boys	12	0	3	9	11	32	3

MACEDONIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sileks	13	10	1	2	26	9	31
Skopje	13	8	3	2	24	14	27
Vardar	13	6	5	2	18	7	23
Pobeda	13	7	2	4	18	9	23
Pelister	13	6	4	3	19	10	22
Makedonija	13	6	3	4	18	12	21
Sloga Skopje	13	5	5	3	14	9	20
Balkan	13	3	4	6	8	13	13
Borec	13	3	4	6	14	20	13
Belasica	13	3	3	7	13	22	12
Cementarnica	13	4	0	9	11	21	12
Sasa	13	3	3	7	9	23	12
Bregalnica	13	4	0	9	13	32	12
Tikvesh	13	1	7	5	8	12	10

NOR. IRELAND

Nov 29: Ballymena 1 Portadown 2; Cliftonville 0 Glentoran 2; Crusaders 1 Omagh 0; Glenavon 1 Ards 2.
Dec 6: Ards 2 Ballymena 1; Glentoran 1 Crusaders 1; Linfield 1 Glenavon 1; Omagh 1 Coleraine 3; Portadown 0 Cliftonville 2.
Dec 13: Ards 1 Linfield 5; Ballymena 4 Cliftonville 0; Glentoran 3 Coleraine 0; Omagh 2 Glenavon 1; Portadown 3 Crusaders 2.
Dec 20: Cliftonville 2 Ards 2; Coleraine 2 Portadown 0; Crusaders 3 Ballymena 4; Glenavon 1 Glentoran 0; Linfield 0 Omagh 0.

NORTHERN IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Portadown	20	10	5	5	30	24	35
Cliftonville	20	10	5	5	30	27	35
Ballymena	20	10	4	6	35	26	34
Coleraine	19	9	3	7	30	22	30
Linfield	19	7	8	4	25	12	29
Glentoran	20	7	4	9	22	21	25
Glenavon	20	6	7	7	27	30	25
Crusaders	20	6	7	7	31	35	25
Omagh	20	3	7	10	25	39	16
Ards	20	3	6	11	23	42	15

PORTUGAL

Saturday, November 29

Belenenses 1 (Barny 37)
Benfica 2 (Edgar 77, 87)

Sunday, November 30

Campomaiorense 4 (Jorginho 4, 82, Vitor Manuel 25, Viqueira 58)
Rio Ave 1 (Marcos 13)

Estrela Amadora 1 (Jose Carlos 84)
Sporting Braga 0

Maritimo 0
Vitoria Guimaraes 1 (Gilmar 54)

Salgueiros 1 (Renato 69)
Boavista 1 (Delfim 33)

Varzim 1 (Miranda 45)
Chaves 1 (Milinkovic 70)

Vitoria Setubal 0
Academica 1 (Vargas 90)

Monday, December 1

Leca 1 (Fran 86)
Sporting Lisbon 0

Friday, December 5

Chaves 2 (Cuc 4, Vieria 26)
FC Porto 2 (Jardel 33, Capucho 35)

FC Porto 5 (Fernando Mendes 4, Zahovic 12, Jardel 46, pen 71, 89)
Farense 2 (Hassan Nader 32, pen 86)

Saturday, December 6

Boavista 0
Martimo 1 (Eusebio 58)

Sporting Lisbon 2 (Yordanov 63, Ramirez 89)
Campomaiorense 0

Guimaraes 5 (Edmilson 57, Basilio 73, 86, Gilmar 80, Paas 82)
Varzim 0

Sporting Braga 3 (Karoglan pen 12, 16, Bruno 38)
Leca 1 (Serifo 85)

Sunday, December 7

Academica 0
Belenenses 0

Benfica 2 (Edgar 12, Panduru pen 44)
Salgueiros 2 (Artur Jorge 8, 20)

Rio Ave 3 (Marcos 3, 31, Gama 51)
Vitoria Setubal 0

Farense 1 (Hajry 78)
Estrela Amadora 1 (Rebelo 61)

Friday, December 12

Maritimo 1 (Bino 53)
Benfica 0

Saturday, December 13

Academica 0
Rio Ave 0

Belenenses 1 (Lito 89)
Salgueiros 2 (Artur Jorge 56, Abilio 90)

Campomaiorense 4 (Isaias 7, 50, 53, Jorginho 83)
Sporting Braga 0

Estrela Amadora 4 (Gaucho 14, Jose Carlos 34, Bodelon 46, 51)
Chaves 1 (Cuc 81)

Leca 2 (Da Silva 77, Constantino 80)
Farense 1 (Hassan Nader 54)

FC Porto 1 (Mielcarski 90)
Guimaraes 0

Varzim 0
Boavista 0

Monday, December 15

Vitoria Setubal 2 (Carlos Manuel 16, Chiquinho 81)
Sporting Lisbon 0

Saturday, December 20

Salgueiros 2 (Artur Jorge 9, Nandinho 71)
Maritimo 0

Sporting Braga 2 (Karoglan 81, Idalecio 90)
Vitoria Setubal 2 (Rui Carlos 18, 42)

Sunday, December 21

Benfica 4 (Nuno Gomes 52, 57, pen 86, 88)
Varzim 0

Chaves 0
Leca 1 (Pedro Estrela 71)

Rio Ave 3 (Peu 57, Baica 84, Emanuel 89)
Belenenses 0

Farense 2 (Marco Nuno 2, Hassan Nader pen 63)
Campomaiorense 2 (Isaias pen 46, 57)

Sporting Lisbon 1 (Marco Almeida 8)
Academica 0

Guimaraes 1 (Edmilson 6)
Estrela Amadora 0

Monday, December 22

Boavista 3 (Timofte 31, 38, Martelinho 63)
FC Porto 4 (Jardel 30, 34, Gaspar 57, Mielcarski 81)

PORTUGAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FC Porto	15	11	4	0	34	13	37
Guimaraes	15	9	1	5	21	10	28
Rio Ave	14	8	3	3	25	17	27
Salgueiros	15	6	6	3	20	13	24
Benfica	15	6	5	4	20	13	23
Sporting	14	6	5	3	13	9	23
Campomaiorense	15	6	4	5	21	20	22
Leca	15	6	4	5	16	16	22
Maritimo	15	6	3	6	16	16	21
Amadora	15	5	4	6	16	19	19
Braga	15	4	6	5	21	23	18
Setubal	15	4	5	6	16	17	17
Boavista	15	3	7	5	12	15	16
Farense	15	3	7	5	16	22	16
Academica	15	3	6	6	12	16	15
Varzim	15	3	6	6	8	21	15
Belenenses	15	1	6	8	8	21	9
Chaves	15	2	2	11	10	24	8

LEADING SCORERS

1 .....Mario Jardel (FC Porto) 16
2 .....Karoglan Mladen (Braga).....9
3 .....Hassan Nader (Farense).....8
4 .....Constantino Jardim (Leca) 7
.....Marcos Santos (Rio Ave) 7
.....Artur Jorge Vicente (Salgueiros) 7
7 .....Gilmar Estevan (Guimaraes).....6
.....Isaias Soares (Campomaiorense).....6
.....Nuno Gomes (Benfica).....6

PORTUGUESE CUP – 5TH RND

Campomaiorense 0 Juventude 1
FC Porto 9 Juventude Evora 1

Stalemate...Milan-Juventus ended all square

REP. IRELAND

Nov 28: St Pats 2 Drogheda 0; Shelbourne 1 Derry C 0.
Nov 29: Finn Harps 3 Bohemians 2; Sligo R 0 Shamrock R 1.
Nov 30: Cork C 1 Kilkenny C 0; UCD 1 Dundalk 3.
Dec 4: Dundalk 5 Sligo R 0.
Dec 5: Drogheda 0 Shelbourne 1; St Pats 1 Finn Harps 0; Shamrock R 2 Bohemians 1.
Dec 6: Kilkenny C 1 UCD 1.
Dec 7: Derry C 1 Cork C 1.
Dec 12: Shelbourne 0 St Pats 2
Dec 13: Finn Harps 2 Shamrock 1; Sligo 2 Kilkenny 0
Dec 14: Bohemians 2 Dundalk 0; Cork C 1 Drogheda 1; UCD 1 Derry C 2.
Dec 18: Dundalk 0 Shamrock R 0.
Dec 19: St Pats 3 Cork C 3; Shelbourne 3 Finn Harps 2
Dec 20: Derry C 0 Sligo R 0.

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
St Patrick's	17	11	5	1	27	13	38
Shelbourne	17	11	2	4	32	18	35
Cork City	17	9	4	4	26	16	31
Shamrock Rovers	17	8	4	5	23	17	28
Dundalk	17	7	5	5	25	19	26
Finn Harps	17	8	2	7	27	25	26
Derry City	17	6	6	5	20	16	24
Bohemians	16	4	8	4	27	18	20
Sligo Rovers	17	4	8	5	24	28	20
UCD	16	3	6	7	15	21	15
Kilkenny City	16	1	2	13	8	37	5
Drogheda United	16	0	4	12	9	35	4

ROMANIA

Nov 29: Arges 2 Foresta 1; Ceahlaul 2 Rapid 1; U Cluj 2 Steaua 3; Sportul 0 Otelul 1; Gloria 3 Jiul 0; Farul 1 National 0; Petrolul 2 CSM Resita 1; Dambovita 1 Bacau 1.
Nov 30: Dinamo 3 U Craiova 0.
Dec 7: Foresta 2 Dambovita 0; National 2 Sportul 1; U Craiova 1 Arges 2; Bacau 2 Petrolul 0; Jiul 0 U Cluj 4; Otelul 3 Gloria 0; CSM Resita 2 Farul 1; Rapid 2 Dinamo 0.
Dec 14: Petrolul 1 Foresta 1; Dambovita 2 U Craiova 1; U Cluj 2 Otelul 0; Steaua 5 Jiul 1; Gloria 3 National 1; Sportul 1 CSM Resita 4; Ceahlaul 2 Dinamo 1; Farul 0 Bacau 3; Arges 0 Rapid 3.
Dec 17: Gloria 0 Steaua 1.

ROMANIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Steaua	19	14	3	2	47	22	45
Rapid	20	14	3	3	40	15	45
Otelul	20	14	1	5	39	13	43
National	20	11	4	5	30	19	37
Arges	20	11	3	6	28	22	36
Resita	20	10	3	7	31	31	33
Dinamo	20	10	2	8	36	29	32
Craiova	20	9	2	9	39	28	29
Ceahlaul	19	8	4	7	22	20	28
Petrolul	20	8	3	9	25	25	27
U Cluj	20	7	4	9	22	20	25
Gloria	20	7	3	10	31	33	24
Farul	20	6	4	10	19	32	22
Foresta	20	5	6	9	16	23	21
Dambovita	20	5	5	10	22	43	20
Bacau	20	4	6	10	17	25	18
Sportul	20	5	2	13	23	34	17
Jiul	20	2	0	18	13	66	6

RUSSIA

FINAL TABLE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spartak	34	22	7	5	67	30	73
Rotor	34	20	8	6	54	27	68
Dinamo	34	19	11	4	50	20	68
Shinnik	34	15	10	9	38	35	55
Lokomotiv M	34	15	9	10	47	37	54
Chernomorets	34	13	14	7	40	26	53
Kryiya Sovetov	34	14	7	13	32	30	49
Zenit	34	13	10	11	28	29	49
Baltika	34	11	16	7	38	33	49
Alania	34	14	4	16	52	42	46
Torpedo-Luzhniki	34	13	6	15	50	46	45
CSKA	34	11	9	14	31	42	42
Rostselmash	34	9	14	11	34	38	41
Zhemchuzhina	34	11	7	16	38	51	40
FK Tyumen	34	9	7	18	28	46	34
Fakel	34	7	5	22	25	49	26
Lokomotiv NN	34	6	5	23	26	60	23
KamAZ-Chally	34	8	3	23	38	75	21

SCOTLAND

Saturday, November 29

Rangers 3 (Gattuso 7, Negri 43, 57)
St Johnstone 2 (Preston 44, O'Boyle 72) Att: 49,142

Hibernian 1 (Dods 75)
Motherwell 1 (Coyle 90) Att: 9,999

Kilmarnock 2 (Nevin 24, 35)
Dunfermline 1 (Smith 39) Att: 6,667

Saturday, December 6

Aberdeen 1 (Rowson 49)
St Johnstone 1 (Grant 80) Att: 10,974

Dundee Utd 0
Dunfermline 0 Att: 6,685

Hearts 2 (Cameron pen 45, Flogel 68)
Motherwell 0 Att: 12,706

Kilmarnock 0
Celtic 0 Att: 15,632

Sunday, December 7

Rangers 1 (Negri pen 51)
Hibernian 0 Att: 48,070

Tuesday, December 9

Aberdeen 0
Celtic 2 (Larsson 41, Jackson 74) Att: 16,981

Dundee Utd 0
Hearts 0 Att: 10,402

Saturday, December 13

Celtic 1 (Burley 80)
Hearts 0 Att: 50,035

Dunfermline 0
Rangers 0 Att: 12,115

Hibernian 2 (Walker 2, 83)
Aberdeen 2 (Dodds 43, Jess 68) Att: 10,001

Motherwell 1 (Coyle 52)
Dundee Utd 0 Att: 4,555

St Johnstone 1 (O'Boyle pen 79)
Kilmarnock 1 (Mitchell 71) Att: 4,385

Saturday, December 20

Celtic 5 (Burley 23, 90, Wieghorst 38, McNamara 48, Larsson 64)
Hibernian 0 Att: 49,094

Dundee Utd 2 (McLaren 10, Olofsson 27)
St Johnstone 1 (Kane 83) Att: 7,342

Hearts 2 (Robertson 17, Hamilton 88)
Rangers 5 (Durie 6, 34, 86, Negri pen 69, Albertz 78) Att: 17,092

Kilmarnock 1 (Wright 27)
Aberdeen 0 Att: 8,452

Motherwell 2 (Coyle 61, 69)
Dunfermline 0 Att: 4,607

Saturday, December 27

Aberdeen 3 (Windass 63, Jess 83, 86)
Motherwell 0 Att: 13,038

Dunfermline 1 (Bingham pen 16)
Hearts 3 (Hamilton 7, Westwater og 28, Salvatori 33) Att: 11,689

Rangers 4 (Laudrup 43, Cleland 44, Negri 82, pen 90)
Dundee Utd 1 (Olofsson 28) Att: 50,017

Hibernian 0
Kilmarnock 1 (Wright 43) Att: 10,543

St Johnstone 1 (O'Boyle 72)
Celtic 0 Att: 10,455

SCOTLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Rangers	20	12	6	2	51	23	42
Celtic	20	13	2	5	36	13	41
Hearts	20	13	2	5	44	26	41
Kilmarnock	20	8	4	8	22	34	28
St Johnstone	20	7	5	8	21	26	26
Dundee Utd	20	6	6	8	30	31	24
Dunfermline	20	5	6	9	22	38	21
Motherwell	20	5	4	11	24	36	19
Aberdeen	20	4	7	9	21	34	19
Hibernian	20	3	6	11	25	35	15

Celtic joy...Craig Burley celebrates his goal in the Scottish League Cup Final

LEADING SCORERS

1 .....Marco Negri (Rangers) 30
2 .....Henrik Larsson (Celtic) 12
.....Kjell Olfosson (Dundee U) 12
4 .....Andy Smith (Dunfermline) 8
5 .....Owen Coyle (Motherwell) 7
.....Wright (Kilmarnock) 7

COCA-COLA CUP – FINAL

Sunday, November 30

Celtic 3 (Rieper 21, Larsson 24, Burley 59)
Dundee Utd 0 Att: 49,305

SLOVAKIA

SLOVAKIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Spartak Trnava	15	11	4	0	34	14	37
Kosice	15	10	4	1	38	10	34
Inter Bratislava	15	9	3	3	27	13	30
Tauris	15	7	6	2	26	10	27
Trencin	15	6	4	5	23	16	22
Slovan	15	6	4	5	24	20	22
Zilina	15	6	3	6	12	16	21
Ruzomberok	15	5	4	6	21	26	19
Dukla Banska	15	4	6	5	19	21	18
Petrimex	15	4	5	6	17	26	17
Chemlon	15	5	2	8	16	31	17
Tatran	15	4	4	7	11	19	16
Dunajska	15	3	4	8	14	25	13
Lok. Kosice	15	3	4	8	17	29	13
Artmedia	15	3	2	10	14	22	11
Bardejov	15	2	5	8	10	20	11

SPAIN

Monday, November 24

Espanyol 1 (Quique Martin 16)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Tsjerysjev 68) Att: 14,200

Saturday, November 29

Sporting Gijon 2 (Ledjachov 30, Trotta 40)
Real Betis 3 (Oli 11, Alfonso 35, 70) Att: 11,369

Sunday, November 30

La Coruna 2 (Madar 39, Naybet 85)
Atletico Madrid 2 (Lardin 8, Andrei 81) Att: 18,000

Racing Santander 0
Real Oviedo 0 Att: 13,000

Real Sociedad 5 (Craioveanu 16, 60, Kovacevic 31, Mutiu 39, Gracia pen 90)
Compostela 1 (Bellido 24) Att: 18,000

Real Madrid 3 (Mijatovic 44, Raul 66, Seedorf 70)
Celta Vigo 1 (Gudelj 88) Att: 80,000

Mallorca 0
Real Zaragoza 2 (Soler 37, Kili Gonzalez 90) Att: 16,000

Real Valladolid 3 (Peternac 28, pen 50, Benjamin 80)
Athletic Bilbao 0 Att: 20,300

Tenerife 0
Espanyol 0 Att: 15,000

Valencia 0
Salamanca 1 (Pauleta 59) Att: 45,000

Monday, December 1

Barcelona 3 (Anderson 34, Luis Enrique 70, Rivaldo pen 73)
Merida 1 (Sinval pen 80) Att: 45,000

Saturday, December 6

Atletico Madrid 2 (Bogdanovic 55, Geli 74)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Luna 85) Att: 30,000

Espanyol 1 (Quique Martin 5)
Mallorca 0 Att: 16,800

Real Oviedo 1 (Gonzalez 88)
Real Madrid 1 (Raul 47) Att: 23,000

Real Zaragoza 1 (Aragon 53)
Barcelona 2 (Sergi 17, Rivaldo 30) Att: 35,000

Sunday, December 7

Celta Vigo 2 (Cadete 8, Karpin 39)
Real Valladolid 0 Att: 20,000

Compostela 1 (Ohen 23)
Athletic Bilbao 4 (J. Etxeberria 11, 88, Guerrero 71, 89) Att: 6,500

Merida 1 (Diego Lopez og 4)
Racing Santander 2 (Guerrero 82, Tais 85) Att: 8,500

Real Betis 3 (Finidi 10, 26, 37)
Tenerife 0 Att: 40,000

Real Sociedad 1 (Antia 58)
Valencia 1 (Mendieta 79) Att: 20,000

Salamanca 4 (Pauleta 66, 70, 90, Cesar Brito 79)
La Coruna 1 (Madar 17) Att: 11,581

Saturday, December 13

Athletic Bilbao 2 (Alkorta 88, Rios 89)
Celta Vigo 1 (Revivo 45) Att: 34,000

Barcelona 3 (Luis Enrique 24, Giovanni 51, Sergi 72)
Espanyol 1 (Esnaider pen 58) Att: 95,000

Mallorca 1 (Galvez 1)
Real Betis 2 (Jarni 7, Finidi 38) Att: 15,000

Sunday, December 14

La Coruna 1 (Fran 8)
Real Sociedad 1 (Gracia 42) Att: 20,000

Racing Santander 2 (Schurrer 45, Bestsjastnych 88)
Real Zaragoza 3 (Belsue 11, Aragon pen 47, Yordi 87) Att: 13,000

Real Madrid 1 (Mariano og 29)
Merida 0 Att: 80,000

Real Valladolid 1 (Peternac 36)
Real Oviedo 0 Att: 17,800

Sporting Gijon 1 (Kucharski 44)
Salamanca 1 (Pauleta 24) Att: 18,188

Tenerife 2 (Makaay 29, Kodro pen 42)
Atletico Madrid 2 (Jose Mari 78, Pantic 88) Att: 15,000

Valencia 4 (Lopez 11, Vlaovic 62, Angulo 64, Ortega 86)
Compostela 1 (William 87) Att: 45,000

Wednesday, December 17

Atletico Madrid 2 (Santi 12, Bogdanovic 50)
Mallorca 3 (Galvez 1, Carreras 42, Valeron 69) Att: 15,000

Compostela 0
Celta Vigo 0 Att: 6,000

Espanyol 0
Racing Santander 0 Att: 12,000

Merida 0
Real Valladolid 0 Att: 8,000

Real Oviedo 1 (Cesar 84)
Athletic Bilbao 2 (Urzaiz 20, 85) Att: 18,000

Real Sociedad 2 (Craioveanu 50, Kovacevic pen 81)
Sporting Gijon 1 (Luna 63) Att: 15,000

Real Zaragoza 2 (Sundgren 45, Acuna 52)
Real Madrid 2 (Raul 3, Guti 22) Att: 32,000

Salamanca 2 (Taira 2, Silvani 62)
Tenerife 0 Att: 8,800

Thursday, December 18

Valencia 1 (Vlaovic 54)
La Coruna 0 Att: 40,000

Saturday, December 20

Barcelona 3 (Luis Enrique 48, 71, Giovanni pen 65)
Atletico Madrid 1 (Roberto 22) Att: 80,000

Sunday, December 21

Athletic Bilbao 5 (Guerrero 4, Rios 36, Urzaiz 49, Javi Gonzalez 86, J. Etxeberria 89)
Merida 1 (Sinval 70) Att: 36,000

Reigning in Spain...Barca stayed top after beating Atletico

Celta Vigo 3 (Cadete 63, Revivo 83, Karpin 90)
Real Oviedo 0 Att: 19,500

Compostela 0
La Coruna 0 Att: 8,000

Racing Santander 2 (Correa 49, Ismael 87)
Betis Sevilla 0 Att: 13,000

Real Madrid 2 (Suker 16, 71)
Espanyol 1 (Pacheta 14) Att: 60,000

Real Valladolid 4 (Victor 24, Peternac 51, Julio Cesar 72, Garcia Calvo 84)
Real Zaragoza 0 Att: 17,000

Sporting Gijon 0
Valencia 3 (Farinos 10, Lopez 42, 65) Att: 16,298

Tenerife 0
Real Sociedad 0 Att: 14,000

Monday, December 22

Mallorca 1 (Amato 90)
Salamanca 0 Att: 13,000

SPAIN

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Barcelona	17	13	1	3	38	20	40
Real Madrid	18	11	6	1	32	14	39
Sociedad	18	8	8	2	25	12	32
Celta	18	9	4	5	30	20	31
Athletic Bilbao	18	8	7	3	28	20	31
Atletico Madrid	18	8	6	4	39	24	30
Espanyol	18	7	8	3	25	13	29
Mallorca	18	7	6	5	26	17	27
Betis	17	7	5	5	23	23	26
Zaragoza	18	6	6	6	28	33	24
Racing	18	6	5	7	20	22	23
Oviedo	18	5	8	5	18	23	23
Valencia	18	6	3	9	20	23	21
Valladolid	18	5	5	8	17	25	20
Salamanca	18	4	5	9	13	21	17
Merida	18	4	5	9	13	27	17
Deportivo	18	2	10	6	17	22	16
Compostela	18	3	7	8	22	33	16
Tenerife	18	3	6	9	14	29	15
Sporting	18	0	3	15	15	42	3

LEADING SCORERS

1 .....Luis Enrique (Barcelona) 12
2 .....Rivaldo (Barcelona) 10
3 .....Christian Vieri (Atletico Madrid) 9
4 .....Fernando Morientes (Real Madrid) 8
.....Pauleta Recende (Salamanca) 8
.....Raul Gonzalez (Real Madrid) 8

COPA DEL REY – 3RD RND, 1ST LEG

Dec 2: Las Palmas 3 Real Mallorca 2
Dec 3: Recreativo Huela 0 Celta Vigo 1; Figueras 1 Valencia 1; Novelda 2 Real Zaragoza 2; Lorca 2 Merida 0; Alaves 1 Compostela 0; Osasuna 3 Racing Santander 0; Extremadura 1 Salamanca 0
Dec 4: Xerez 1 Real Sociedad 0

SWITZERLAND

Sunday, November 30

Basel 1 (Subiat 56)
Grasshopper 0 Att: 6,000

Etoile Carouge 1 (Negri 69)
Aarau 1 (Kirik 72) Att: 1,100

Kriens 1 (Benson 69)
St Gallen 5 (Sene 27, Regtop 58, Nyathi 80, Buhlmann pen 88, Tsawa 90) Att: 2,800

Lausanne 1 (Ohrel 16)
Lucerne 1 (Sawu 37) Att: 5,500

Sion 1 (Ouattara 59)
Servette 1 (Rey 25) Att: 11,000

Zurich 3 (Tarone 48, Gambino 78, Nonda 82)
Neuchatel Xamax 0 Att: 8,100

Sunday, December 7

Aarau 4 (Kirik 5, 80, 85, Melunovic 54)
Lausanne 2 (Celestini pen 31, Thurre 56) Att: 4,100

Grasshopper 3 (Turkyilmaz 32, Esposito 36, Moldovan 55)
Zurich 1 (Di Jorio 58) Att: 3,400

Lucerne 0
Basel 1 (Frick pen 47) Att: 9,050

Neuchatel Xamax 4 (Kunz 4, Jeanneret 48, Isabella 65, 72)
Kriens 1 (Gross 90) Att: 3,000

St Gallen 0
Sion 0 Att: 8,100

Servette 5 (Sesa 19, 54, 64, Fournier 27, Juarez 52)
Etoile Carouge 1 (Bugnard pen 61) Att: 4,500

SWITZERLAND

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Grasshopper	22	14	4	4	59	23	46
Lausanne	22	12	6	4	45	27	42
Servette	22	11	6	5	45	33	39
Aarau	22	10	5	7	38	31	35
St.Gallen	22	7	9	6	38	34	30
Zurich	22	7	9	6	31	28	30
Sion	22	7	9	6	30	27	30
Luzern	22	7	8	7	26	28	29
Xamax	22	7	5	10	37	39	26
Kriens	22	5	7	10	23	41	22
Basel	22	5	4	13	28	46	19
Carouge	22	1	6	15	20	63	9

LEADING SCORERS

1 .....Viorel Moldovan (Grasshopper) 16
2 .....Kubilay Turkyilmaz (Grasshopper) 13
3 .....Shabani Nonda (Zurich) 12
4 .....Isetsema N'Kufo (Lausanne) 11
5 .....Hendrik Regtop (St Gallen) 10
.....David Sesa (Servette) 10
.....Alexander Ediy (Servette) 10
.....Sasa Kirik (Aarau) 10

TURKEY

Dec 7: Antalya 0 C. Dardanel 0; Kayseri 1 Galatasaray 2; Besiktas 2 Fenerbahce 2; Genclerbirligi 0 Kocaeli 0; Trabzon 2 D.C. Karabuk 0; Seker 1 Van 1; Samsun 0 Ankaragucu 2; Altay 1 Istanbul 3; Gaziantep 1 Bursa 2.
Dec 14: Ankaragucu 1 Trabzon 3; Van 0 Genclerbirligi 0; D.C. Karabuk 1 Altay 1; Istanbul 2 Galatasaray 1; Kocaeli 1 Gaziantep 1; C. Dardanel 3 Kayseri 0; Fenerbahce 7 Seker 0; Antalya 3 Besiktas 3; Bursa 2 Samsun 3.
Dec 21: Samsun 1 Kocaeli 1; Besiktas 1 C. Dardanel 2; Genclerbirligi 3 Fenerbahce 0; Trabzon 1 Bursa 0; Altay 3 Ankaragucu 0; Gaziantep 0 Van 0; Kayseri 0 Istanbul 0; Seker 2 Antalya 1; Galatasaray 3 D.C. Karabuk 0.

TURKEY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Fenerbahce	17	12	3	2	35	12	39
Trabzonspor	17	11	3	3	32	17	36
Galatasaray	17	10	3	4	38	22	33
Besiktas	17	8	6	3	34	18	30
Istanbulspor	17	8	6	3	33	19	30
Bursaspor	17	8	4	5	25	21	28
Samsunspor	17	7	4	6	24	21	25
Dardanelspor	17	6	6	5	20	16	24
D.C. Karabukspor	17	7	3	7	18	24	24
Kocaelispor	17	6	5	6	22	19	23
Ankaragucu	17	5	5	7	15	21	20
Kayserispor	17	5	5	7	15	23	19
Genclerbirligi	17	4	6	7	15	16	18
Gaziantepspor	17	4	5	8	19	26	17
Sekerspor	17	4	5	8	18	37	17
Altay Izmir	17	4	4	9	18	31	16
Antalyaspor	17	3	5	9	24	33	14
Vanspor	17	0	5	12	13	42	5

YUGOSLAVIA

Nov 30: Obilic 1 Proleter 0; Buducnost 0 Cukaricki 1; Partizan 5 Vojvodina 6; Hajduk 1 Zeleznik 0; Rad 4 Zemun 0; Mladost 0 Crvena Zvezda 1.
Dec 6: Proleter 1 Partizan 2; Crvena zvezda 1 Rad 0; Zemun 1 Hajduk 0; Vojvodina 4 Cukaricki 2.
Dec 7: Zeleznik 3 Obilic 4.
Dec 13: Partizan 3 Zeleznik 0; Rad 3 Mladost 1; Cukaricki 3 Proleter 1; Hajduk 0 Crvena zvezda 0; Buducnost 2 Vojvodina 3; Obilic 2 Zemun 1.
Dec 17: Crvena zvezda 0 Obilic 1; Zemun 1 Partizan 2; Rad 0 Buducnost 0; Zeleznik 2 Cukaricki 1; Mladost 2 Hajduk 1; Proleter 2 Vojvodina 0.
Dec 20: Mladost 1 Buducnost 0.

YUGOSLAVIA

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
FK Obilic Beograd	17	13	3	1	32	13	42
Crvena zvezda	17	13	2	2	37	11	41
Partizan Beograd	17	12	3	2	49	22	39
Vojvodina	17	7	5	5	34	33	26
Rad Beograd	17	6	4	7	17	16	22
FK Zeleznik	17	6	3	8	22	25	21
Mladost Lucani	17	6	2	9	17	30	20
FK Zemun	17	5	4	8	19	32	19
Hajduk Kula	17	5	3	9	19	29	18
FK Cukaricki	17	5	2	10	18	21	17
Proleter Zrenjanin	17	4	1	12	20	34	13
Buducnost	17	1	6	10	11	29	9

GOLDEN SHOE

Top five standings at Jan 6, 1998
Information supplied by Reuters

.....Pts (gls)
1 ...Marco Negri (Rangers) 45 (30)
2 ...Nikos Mahlas (Vitesse) 44 (22)
3 ...Sigurd Rushfeldt (Rosenborg) 37.5 (25)
4 ...Harald Brattbakk (Rosenborg) 34.5 (23)
5 ...Oleg Veretennikov (Rotor Volgograd) 33 (22)

SOUTH AMERICA

SUPER CUP

(for Libertadores Cup winners)

Final, 1st leg

Dec 5 - Sao Paulo (Braz)
Sao Paulo (Bra) **0**
River Plate (Arg) **0**
Ref: M. Sanchez (Chil).
Sao Paulo: Rogerio, Ze Carlos, Edmilson, Alvaro (Reinaldo 61), Serginho, Fabiano, Sidney, Alexandre, Marcelinho, Dodo, Franca (Fabio Mello 84).
River Plate: G. Burgos, H. Diaz, C. Aayala, E. Berizzo, J. Sorin (M. Escudero 70), R. Monserrat, L. Astrada (L. Gancedo 59), S. Berti (sent off 48), M. Gallardo, E. Francescoli, M. Salas.

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 17 - Buenos Aires (Arg)
River Plate (Arg) **2** (Salas 47, 58)
Sao Paulo (Bra) **1** (Dodo 51)
HT: 0-0. **Ref:** U. Aquino (Parag). **Att:** 70,000.
River Plate: G. Burgos, H. Diaz, C. Aayala, E. Berizzo, D. Placente, R. Monserrat, L. Astrada *(sent off 74)*, J. Sorin (M. Escudero 83), M. Gallardo (S. Solari 86), M. Salas, E. Francescoli (L. Gancedo 77).
Sao Paulo: Roger, Ze Carlos, Ednilson, Alvaro, Serginho, Fabiano (Claudio 69), Sidney, Alexandre (Fabio Mello 83), Marcelinho*, Dodo, V. Aristizabal (Reinaldo 60). ***Marcelinho sent off 75***
River Plate won 2-1 on agg.

CONMEBOL CUP

Final, 2nd leg

Dec 17 - Belo Horizonte (Bra)
Atletico Mineiro (Bra) **1** (Jorginho 9)
Lanus (Arg) **1** (Trimarchi 58)
HT: 1-0. **Ref:** E. Gonzalez (Parag). **Att:** 15,000.
Mineiro: Taffarel, Bruno, Sandro Barbosa *(sent off 90)*, Negrete, Dede, Roberto, Hernani, Jorginho, Marquez, Valdir, Almir (Edgar 62).
Lanus: R. Burela, G. Ramon, A. Bressan, M. Fernandez, M. Roman, L. Mas (S. Gonzalez 80), C. Huertas (J. Fernandez 72), D. Cravero, S. Ciotet, M. Trimarchi (Raices 66), C. Enria.
Atletico Mineiro won 5-2 on agg

ARGENTINA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Tuesday, December 2

Argentinos Juniors 1 (Saavedra 79)
Gimnasia Y Esgrima de Jujuy 3 (Astudillo 44, Diaz 77, Herrera 90)

Friday, December 5

Ferro Carril Oeste 3 (Sartori 49, Sotomayor og 52, Lopez 88)
Velez Sarsfield 3 (Cordone 4, 15, C. Husain 44)

Gimnasia Y Tiro Salta 1 (N. Caceres 65)
Argentinos Juniors 0

Saturday, December 6

Rosario Central 1 (Coudet 89)
San Lorenzo 2 (Gorosito 17, Luis Fernando 88)

Colon Santa Fe 0
Gimnasia Y Esgrima de Jujuy 4 (Herrera 42, Lobo 44, Fernandez 51, Juarez 77)

Sunday, December 7

River Plate 3 (Gallardo 61, 86, M. Salas 88)
Independiente 0

Gimnasia Y Esgrima de La Plata 0
Boca Juniors 1 (Palermo 90)

Lanus 3 (Ruggeri pen 10, A. Lopez 16, Mas 90)
Estudiantes De La Plata 0

Racing Club 3 (Vilallonga 6, 89, Delgado pen 73)
Union Santa Fe 0 Deportivo Espanol 2 (Parodi 36, Grondona 81)

Deportivo Espanol 2 (Parodi 36, Grondona 81)
Newell's Old Boys 2 ((Muller 34, Zamora 59)

Huracan 0
Platense 1 (Arbarello 90)

Tuesday, December 9

Gimnasia Y Esgrima de Jujuy 1 (Merales Santos 7) **River Plate 3** (M. Salas 67, s. Berti 75, Cardetti 90)

Boca Juniors 0
Racing Club 0

Platense 3 (Vattimos 31, pen 72, Hanuch 78)
Gimnasia Y Esgrima de La Plata 2 (Pereyra 37, Sosa pen 69)

Estudiantes de la Plata 0
Rosari Central 4 (Da Silva 33, 55, Gaitan 46, Rivarola 89)

Independiente 2 (Burruchaga 10, Guerrero 58)
Lanus 1 (Siviero 9)

Union Santa e 1 (Bourdier 39)
Gimnasia Y Tiro Salta 0

Newell's Old Boys 2 (Lujambio 12, 41)
Huracan 1 (Castagno 59)

Wednesday, December 10

Velez Sarsfield 1 (Cardozo 39)
Deportivo Espanol 1 (J. Parodi 71)

San Lorenzo 3 (Biaggio 28, Abreu 31, 76)
Ferro Carril Oeste 3 (Chaparro 11, Martens 46, Bustos 42, Marcelo 44)

Thursday, December 11

Argentinos Juniors 2 (P. Gomez 8, Quinteros pen 39) **Colon Santa Fe 1** (Gordillo 18)

Saturday, December 13

Gimnasia Y Esgrima de La Plata 3 (Sosa 11, Guglielminpietro 54, Sanguinetti 76)
Newell's Old Boys 2 (Faggiani 87, Muller 89)

Rosario Central 4 (Maceratesi 15, 26, Carracedo 63, Da Silva pen 74)
Independiente 0

Sunday, December 14

River Plate 2 (Francescoli 5, Salas 75)
Colon Santa Fe 1 (Castillo 69)

Gimnasia Y Tiro Salta 0
Boca Juniors 1 (Islas 75)

Deportivo Espaol 2 (Reinoso 15, 24)
San Lorenzo 6 (Montenegro 21, 84, Lussenhoff 30, Abreu 64, 72, Biaggio 77)

Lanus 1 (Knett 23)
Gimnasia Y Esgrima de Jujuy 0

Huracan 1 (Biscay 40)
Velez Sarsfield 1 (D. Husain 66)

Union Santa Fe 1 (Cabrol pen 20)
Argentinos Juniors0

Monday, December 15

Racing Club 2 (Delghado pen 54, Vilallonga 69)
Platense 1 (Romagnoli 6)

Ferro Carril Oeste 1 (V. Lopez 73)
Estudiantes de La Plata 2 (Villarreal 12, Furiga 58)

Friday, December 19

San Lorenzo 0
Huracan 0
(suspended in 20th min - crowd incidents)

Velez Sarsfield 4 (Camps 34, 66, Zandona 39, C. Husain 42)
Gimnasia Y Esgrima De La Plata 1 (Sosa 43)

Satuday, December 20

Newell's Old Boys 1 (Gaitan og 83)

Racing Club 1 (Delgado 80)

Sunday, December 21

Argentinos Juniors 1 (Saavedra 76)
River Plate 1 (Salas 42)

Platense 2 (Jimenez 20, Sponton 71)
Gimnasia Y Tiro Salta 1 (Scotto 90)

Independiente 2 (Diaz 49, Amaya 77)
Ferro Carril Oeste 0

Gimnasia Y Esgrima De Jujuy 2 (Herrera 26, Sanchez 51)
Rosario Central 3 (Da Silva 23, 83, Coudet 60)

Colon Santa Fe 2 (C. Castillo 30, Fuertes 77)
Lanus 1 (Ibagaza 82)

Boca Juniors 4 (Arruabarrena 4, Palermo 22, Solano pen 50, Latorre 70)
Union Santa Fe 0

Monday, December 22

Estudiantes De La Plata 3 (Furiga 24, Piersimene 74, Villarreal 81)
Deportivo Espanol 1 (Canobbio 48)

ARGENTINA NATIONAL OPENING CHAMPIONSHIP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
River Plate	19	14	3	2	43	17	45
Boca Juniors	19	13	5	1	35	12	44
Rosario Central	19	10	5	4	35	20	35
Velez Sarsfield	19	8	8	3	42	23	32
San Lorenzo*	18	9	5	4	42	32	32
Glm.y.Esg.La.Plata	19	9	5	5	33	27	32
Independiente	19	9	3	7	29	31	30
Argentinos Jnrs	19	9	2	8	23	24	29
Platense	19	7	7	5	25	26	28
Est. de. La Plata	19	7	5	7	25	24	26
Lanus	19	7	4	8	29	30	25
Ferro Carril Oeste	19	6	6	7	33	31	24
Racing Club	19	5	6	8	24	28	21
Glm.y.Esg.Jujuy	19	5	5	9	25	28	20
Colon Santa Fe	19	5	5	9	23	33	20
Union Santa Fe	19	5	5	9	25	43	20
Deportivo Espanol	19	4	5	10	26	43	17
Newell's Old Boys	19	3	5	11	22	38	14
Huracan*	18	3	3	12	20	32	12
Glm.y.Tiro Salta	19	2	6	11	14	30	12

*suspended 20 mins (0-0) pending resolution.
Bottom relegation standings (average points over three seasons – bottom two relegated at end of closing championship): Huracan 1.180, Gim y Esgrima Jujuy 1.136, Union 1.122, Dep. Espanol 0.989, Gimnasia y Tiro 0.631.

BOLIVIA

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP – FINAL ROUND

Nov 9: Wilstermann 2-1 Oriente 1; Blooming 3-0 Strongest 0; Bolivar 3-0 Chaco 0.
Nov 18, 19: Chaco 1 Oriente 2; Blooming 0 Bolivar 3; Strongest 3 Wilstermann 2.
Nov 23: Wilstermann 2 Chaco 0; Bolivar 3 Strongest 1; Oriente 1 Blooming 2.
Nov 26, 27: Bolivar 5 Wilstermann 0; Blooming 2 Chaco 1; Oriente 1 Strongest 0.
Nov 30: Oriente 1 Bolivar 0; Chaco 3 Strongest1; Wilstermann 2 Blooming 1.
Dec 5, 6, 7: Bolivar 8 Chaco 1; Strongest 2 Blooming 0; Oriente 3 Wilstermann 0.
Dec 10: Strongest 3 Wilstermann 2; Bolivar 3 Blooming 3; Oriente 3 Chaco 0.
Dec 13, 14: Chaco 1 Wilstermann 5; Strongest 1 Bolivar 2; Oriente 5 Blooming 2.
Dec 17: Wilstermann 1 Bolivar 2; Strongest 3 Oriente 2; Blooming 4 Chaco 2.
Dec 20: Blooming 4 Wilstermann 0; Strongest 2 Chaco 1; Bolivar 4 Oriente 1.

BOLIVIA – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
*Bolivar	10	8	1	1	33	9	25
*Oriente Petrolero	10	6	0	4	20	14	18
Blooming	10	5	1	4	21	19	16
The Strongest	10	5	0	5	16	19	15
Wilstermann	10	4	0	6	16	23	12
Chaco Petrolero	10	1	0	9	10	32	3

Qualify for Libertadores Cup

BRAZIL

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP

2ND STAGE

Nov15: Juventude 0 Vasco 3; Atletico/MG 2 Santos 0.
Nov 16: Flamengo 1 Portuguesa 0; Palmeiras 1 Internacional 0.
Nov 22: Portuguesa 2 Juventude 0; Internacional 2 Atletico/MG 0.
Nov 23: Vasco 1 Flamengo 1; Santos 3 Palmeiras 3.
Nov 26: Juventude 3 Flamengo 2; Atletico/MG 0 Palmeiras 1; Vasco 2 Portuguesa 1; Santos 4 Internacional 0.
Nov 29: Portuguesa 1 Vasco 3; Internacional 4 Santos 1.
Nov 30: Flamengo 2 Juventude 0; Palmeiras 3 Atletico/MG 1.
Dec 3: Flamengo 1 Vasco 4; Juventude 2 Portuguesa 1; Palmeiras 1 Santos 0; Atletico/MG 3 Internacional.
Dec 6/7: Portuguesa 0 Flamengo 0; Vasco 1 Juventude 1; Santos 1 Atletico/MG 0; Internacional 0 Palmeiras 1.

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
*Vasco da Gama	6	4	2	0	14	5	14
Flamengo	6	2	2	2	7	8	8
Juventude	6	2	1	3	6	11	7
Portuguesa	6	1	1	4	5	8	4

** qualified for Final*

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
*Palmeiras	6	5	1	0	10	4	16
Santos	6	2	1	3	9	10	7
Internacional	6	2	0	4	8	10	6
Atletico/MG	6	2	0	4	6-	9	6

** qualified for Final*

FINAL

December 14

Palmeiras 0 Vasco 0

December 20)

Vasco 0 Palmeiras 0
Vasco won title because of better overall record

CHILE

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Nov 29, 30: La Serena 1 Universidad Catolica 0; Palestino 0 Colo Colo 1; Universidad de Chile 1 Audax Italiano 2; Cobreloa 5 Antofagasta 0; Stgo. Wanderers 0 Osorno 0; Huachipato 1 Coquimbo 3; Union Espanola 2 Temuco 1; Puerto Montt 1 Concepcion 0.
Dec 6, 7: Osorno 0 Temuco 0; Coquimbo 2 Union Espanola 1; Colo Colo 3 Huachipato 2; Antofagasta 2 Palestino 1; Audax Italiano 4 Cobreloa 2; Concepcion 0 Universidad de Chile 5; Universidad Catolica 2 Puerto Montt 0; Stgo. Wanderers 2 La Serena 2
Dec 13, 14: La Serena 1 Osorno 0; Puerto Montt 4 Stgo. Wanderers 1; Universidad de Chile 0 Universidad Catolica 0; Cobreloa 4 Concepcion 0; Palestino 2 Audax Italiano 1; Huachipato 0 Antofagasta 2; Union Espanola 2 Colo Colo 3; Temuco 1 Coquimbo 1.
Dec 20, 21: Osorno 0 Coquimbo Unido 0; Colo Colo 4 Temuco 0; Antofagasta 2 Union Espanola 0; Audax Italiano 4 Huachipato 0; Concepcion 2 Palestino 0; Universidad Catolica 1 Cobreloa 1; Stgo. Wanderers 1 Universidad de Chile 1; La Serena 1 Puerto Montt 1.

CHILE – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Colo Colo	15	11	2	2	33	19	35
Univ. Catolica	15	9	3	3	25	15	30
Audax Italiano	15	9	2	4	31	16	29
Univ. de Chile	15	7	5	3	36	17	26
Cobreloa	15	7	4	4	28	17	25
Puerto Montt	15	6	4	5	21	20	22
Provincial Osorno	15	5	6	4	19	15	21
Coquimbo Unido	15	5	6	4	15	13	21
La Serena	15	5	4	6	21	20	19
Palestino	15	5	2	8	13	21	17
Antofagasta	15	5	2	8	15	27	17
Huachipato	15	4	4	7	13	22	16
Union Espanola	15	4	3	8	22	27	15
Deportes Temuco	15	4	3	8	18	31	15
Stgo Wanderers	15	2	5	8	13	26	11
Concepcion	15	2	5	8	15	32	11

COLOMBIA

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

SEMI-FINAL STAGE

Nov 19: Junior 2 Tulua 1; Millonarios 0 Bucaramanga 0 (4-5 on pens); Caldas 1 Cali 2; Quindio 0-0 Nacional 0 (4-5 on pens).
Nov 23: Tulua 1 Millonarios 1 (2-3 on pens); Nacional1 Caldas 0; Cali 1 Quindio 3; Bucaramanga 2 Junior 0.
Nov 27: Cali 4 Nacional 2; Caldas 2 Quindio 1; Tulua 1 Bucaramanga 1 (2-3 on pens); Junior 0 Millonarios 0 (3-4 on pens).
Nov 30: Nacional 2 Cali 1; Quindio 1 Caldas 1 (4-3 on pens); Millonarios 3 Junior 2; Bucaramanga 1 Tulua 1 (6-5 on pens).
Dec 3: Nacional 0 Quindio 1; Cali 0 Caldas 1; Bucaramanga 1 Millonarios 1 (3-4 on pens); Tulua 1 Junior 1 (4-3 on pens).
Dec 6: Quindio 2 Cali 1; Caldas 2 Nacional 1; Junior 0 Bucaramanga 4; Millonarios 4 Tulua 1.

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Quindio	6	3	1/1	1	8	5	12
Once Caldas	6	3	0/1	2	7	6	10
Nacional	6	2	1/0	3	6	8	8
Cali	6	2	0/0	4	9	11	6

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Bucaramanga	6	2	3/1	0	9	3	13
Millonarios	6	2	3/1	0	9	5	13
Tulua	6	0	1/3	2	6	10	5
Junior	6	1	0/2	3	5	11	5

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

FINAL

December 10

Bucaramanga 2 (Restrepo 34pen, Ballesteros 35)
Quindio 1 (Marrero 67pen)

December 13

Quindio 1 (Miguel Marrero 59pen)
Bucaramanga 1 (Orlando Ballesteros 90)
Bucaramanga win 3-2 on agg and play off against America for Championship

OVERALL CHAMPIONSIP FINAL

December 17

Bucaramanga 0
America 1 (Jairo Castillo 66)

December 21

America 2 (Adolfo Valencia 43, Julian Trellez 75)
Bucaramanga 0
America win 3-0 on agg

ECUADOR

CHAMPIONSHIP – FINAL ROUND

Dec 7: Nacional 1 LDU 1; Emelec 3 Aucas 0; Dep Quito 2 Barcelona 2.
Dec 10: Aucas 0 Dep Quito 0; LDU 1 Emelec 1; Barcelona 2 Nacional 2.
Dec 14: Dep Quito 2 Nacional 1; Aucas 1 LDU 0; Barcelona 2 Emelec 0.
Dec 21: Dep Quito 5 Emelec 1; Aucas 2 Nacional 2; Barcelona 2 LDU 2.
Dec 28, 29: Aucas 0 Barcelona 0; LDU 0 Dep Quito 0; Emelec 2 Nacional 1.
Jan 3: Dep Quito 3 LDU 1; Nacional 2 Emelec 1; Barcelona 3 Aucas 1.

ECUADOR

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Deportivo Quito	6	3	3	0	12	5	13 (1)
Barcelona	6	2	3	1	10	7	12 (3)
El Nacional	6	2	2	2	9	9	8 (0)
Emelec	6	2	1	3	8	11	7 (0)
Aucas	6	1	3	2	4	8	6 (0)
LDU Quito	6	0	4	2	5	8	5 (1)

Bonus points in brackets

PARAGUAY

CLOSING CHAMPIONSHIP

Nov 9: Guarani 1 Nacional 1 (4-3 on pens); Cerro P 1 Luqueno 3; S Lorenzo 1 Colegiales 0; Olimpia 2 Cerro C 1.
Nov 23: Cerro P 2 Guarani 4; Luqueno 3 Nacional 2 ; Cerro C 2 Colegiales 0; Olimpia 3 S Lorenzo 0.
Nov 30: Luqueno 3 Guarani 0; Nacional 4 Cerro P 3; Colegiales 1 Olimpia 1 (5-4 on pens); S Lorenzo 1 Cerro C 1 (Cerro C on 4-3 pens).

GROUP A – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Luqueno	3	3	0/0	0	9	3	10.5 (1.5)
Guarani	3	1	1/0	1	5	6	7.5 (2.5)
Nacional	3	1	0/1	1	7	7	4 (0)
Cerro Porteno	3	0	0/0	3	6	11	0 (0)

Bonus points in brackets

GROUP B – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Olimpia	3	2	0/1	0	6	2	8 (1)
Cerro Cora	3	1	1/0	1	4	3	8 (3)
San Lorenzo	3	1	0/1	1	2	4	6 (2)
Colegiales	3	0	1/0	2	1	4	2.5 (.5)

Bonus points in brackets
Play-off: Olimpia 2 Cerro C 1

SEMI-FINALS

Dec 5: Olimpia 4 Guarani 2; Cerro C 2 Luqueno 2 (Cerro C 6-5 pens).

FINAL

Dec 5: Olimpia 3 (Gabriel Gonzalez 33, Mauro Caballero 74, Felix Torres 85)
Cerro C 0

CHAMPIONSHIP PLAY-OFF

Dec 14: Olimpia 1 Cerro P 0
Dec 21: Cerro P 1 Olimpia 1
Olimpia win 2-1 on agg

PERU

LIBERTADORES CUP QUALIFYING TOURNAMENT

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sporting Cristal	5	4	1	0	9	1	13
Universitario	5	2	2	1	12	4	8
Melgar	5	2	2	1	4	4	8
Cienciano	5	2	0	3	8	10	6
Alianza	5	1	2	2	8	11	5
Municipal	5	0	1	4	5	16	1

URUGUAY

URUGUAY CLOSING CHAMP – FINAL

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Defensor Sporting	11	7	3	1	16	9	24
Penarol	11	7	2	2	29	15	23
River Plate	11	6	1	4	12	11	19
Liverpool	11	4	6	1	15	13	18
Cerro	11	4	3	4	16	13	15
Nacional	11	4	3	4	20	18	15
Huracan Buceo	11	4	3	4	12	13	15
Rentistas	11	4	2	5	10	18	14
Wanderers	11	3	3	5	9	13	12
Racing	11	3	3	5	14	19	12
Rampla Juniors	11	2	3	6	12	14	9
Danubio	11	0	4	7	13	22	4

OVERALL TABLE

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Penarol	22	13	5	4	51	26	44
Defensor Sporting	22	13	5	4	36	20	44
River Plate	22	12	5	5	36	25	41
Nacional	22	12	4	6	46	29	40
Liverpool	22	9	10	3	30	26	37
Huracan Buceo	22	8	4	10	27	32	28
Wanderers	22	6	7	9	21	26	25
Rampla Juniors	22	6	5	11	24	32	23
Cerro	22	5	7	10	24	28	22
Rentistas	22	6	4	12	14	37	22
Racing	22	4	7	11	22	37	19
Danubio	22	4	5	13	23	36	17

Relegated: Cerro and Racing relegated directly (on points over last 3 seasons). Rentistas to play off against nr. 3 2nd division.

Champions of Mexico...Cruz Azul overcame Leon in the Final

PLAY-OFF

Nov 5: Penarol 3 Nacional 2

CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

Nov 9: Penarol 1 (Serafin Garcia 38)
Defensor 0

Nov 12: Penarol 3 (Pablo Bengoechea 30, Antonio Pacheco 80, Marcelo Zalayeta 88)
Defensor 0
Penarol win 4-0 on agg

LIBERTADORES QUALIFYING COMPETITION - 1ST PHASE

Nov 20, 21: River Plate 2 Defensor 2; Rio Negro 1 Penarol 5; Huracan 4 Punta Este 1; Liverpool 0 Nacional 3.
Nov 22, 23: Penarol 1 Defensor 0; River Plate 8 Rio Negro 0; Nacional 3 Punta Este 0; Huracan 0 Liverpool 0.
Nov 26, 28: Defensor 3 Rio Negro 0; Penarol 3 River Plate 1; Punta Este 1 Liverpool 4; Nacional 4 Huracan 1.

GROUP A

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Penarol	3	3	0	0	9	2	9
River Plate	3	1	1	1	11	5	4
Defensor Sporting	3	1	1	1	5	3	4
Rio Negro	3	0	0	3	1	16	0

GROUP B

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nacional	3	3	0	0	10	1	9
Huracan Buceo	3	1	1	1	5	5	4
Liverpool	3	1	1	1	4	4	4
Punta del Este	3	0	0	3	2	11	0

SEMI-FINALS

Dec 1, 2: Huracan 0 Penarol 1; River Plate 1 Nacional 1 (Nacional 4-2 on pens)

FINAL

Dec 5: Penarol 3 Nacional 1

CONCACAF

GOLD CUP

Group One

Feb 1: El Salvador-Guatemala (Los Angeles)
Feb 3: Brazil-Jamaica (Miami)
Feb 5: Brazil-Guatemala (Miami)
Feb 6: El Salvador-Jamaica (Los Angeles)
Feb 8: Guatemala-Jamaica (Los Angeles)
Feb 8: El Salvador-Brazil (Los Angeles)

Group Two

Feb 1: Honduras-Trinidad
Feb 4: Mexico-Trindad (Oakland)
Feb 7: Mexico-Honduras (Oakland)

Group Three

Feb 1: USA-Cuba (Oakland)
Feb 4: Costa Rica-Cuba (Oakland)
Feb 7: USA-Costa Rica (Oakland)

Semi-finals

Feb 10: Winner gp 3-Runner-up Gp 1, Los Angeles
Feb 12: Winner Gp 1-Winner Gp 2, Los Angeles

Final & 3rd place play-off

Feb 15: Los Anglees

MEXICO

CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

1ST LEG

December 4

Cruz Azul 1 (Benjamin Galindo pen 53)
Leon 0
Fabian Pratola (Leon) sent off 43 min
Alberto Garcia (Leon) sent off 52 min

CHAMPIONSHIP FINAL

2ND LEG

December 7

Leon 1 (Missael Espinoza 53)
Cruz Azul 1 (Carlos Hermosillo pen 101)
Cruz Azul win 2-1 on agg

ASIA

JAPAN

SUNTORY CHAMPIONSHIP

Saturday, December 6

Jubilo Iwata 3 (Nakayama 1, 46, Shimizu 119)
Kashima Antlers 2 (Bismarck 62, Mazinho 88) Att: 17,269

Saturday, December 13

Kashima Antlers 0
Jubilo Iwata 1 (Nakayama 81) Att: 15,276
Jubilo Iwata win 4-2 on agg

AFRICA

Northern hat-trick

Mark Gleeson reports on Africa's top three tournaments

NORTHERN clubs dominated the three major African club tournaments, with Raja Casablanca of Morocco winning the Champions Cup and Tunisian teams taking the other two titles. Etoile Sahel of Sousse won the Cup-winners Cup, and Esperance of Tunis lifted the CAF Cup.

So the top title is in northern hands for the 13th time in 14 years, but once again penalties were needed to keep it in the Afro-Arab domain.

Raja's second title, eight years after their first, came via a 5-4 win over Goldfields of Ghana after the two legs had ended 1-1 on aggregate. Goldfields won the first leg in Obuasi, when Lawrence Adjei's late goal gave them the lead in a match they should have lost. Then they lifted their game for the second leg, before 80,000 in Casablanca, and held out until the 71st minute, when Adelkrim Nazir scored his fifth goal of the tournament.

As in the previous year, when Zamalek of Egypt edged out Shooting Stars of Nigeria, Raja held off the West African challenge. Both teams missed once in the first five attempts, but Goldfields squandered the first in the sudden-death stage, allowing international midfielder Fahmi Abedelilah to strike the decisive shot.

Only South Africa's Orlando Pirates (1995) have been able to break the northern grip on this title.

Tunisia's great year, in which they qualified for both the World Cup and the African Nations Cup, was crowned by the Sahel-Esperance triumphs, within a week of each other.

Esperance lost the first leg to Paulo Silva's late goal for Petro Atletico in Angola, but Ziad Tiemcani's equaliser came early in the second leg, and Khaled Badra scored the winner straight after half-time, to add the CAF Cup to the Champions Cup that Esperance won in 1994.

Sahel repeated that 2-1 margin against Morocco's Royal Armed Forces in the Cup-winners Cup, but with the scores reversed. Imed Mhedhibi and Imid Ben Younes netted in the first game, and with key players back from suspension the Tunisians were able to limit RAF to one long-range effort, by Abdelouhad Chamami, in the second.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Final

Goldfields 1 (Lawrence Adjei 80)
Raja Casablanca 0

Raja Casablanca 1 (Abdelkrim Nazir 71)
Goldfields 0
1-1 on agg. Raja won 5-4 on pens

CUP-WINNERS CUP

Quarter-finals

Mansoura 3 (Emad Salama 10, Ayman Moheb 55, Tawfik Sakr 58)
Jomo Cosmos 0

Jomo Cosmos 2 (Tico-Tico 23, Vusi Mncwango 89)
Mansoura 2 (Walid Salah 32, 41)
Mansoura win 5-2 on agg

Arab Contractors 2 (Mahmoud Al Aref 15, Haytham Hussein 83)
Etoile Sahel 2 (Kridene 51, Raouene 80)

Etoile Sahel 2 (Ali Kablouti 79, Riadh Jelassi 89)
Arab Contractors 0
Sahel won 4-2 on agg

St Louisienne 2 (Rasolosoa pen 20, Nicolas Rodor 89)
SO Armee 0

SO Armee 3 (Sounkalo Traore 37, Sery pen 50, Elo Lokpo 88)
St Louisienne 1 (Kambei Seck 69')
3-3 on agg. St Louisienne won on away goals

Royal Armed Forces 2 (Youssef Ouaghzif 47, Mohammed Foulouh 78)
Mouloudia Oran 0

Mouloudia Oran 1 (Amrane 58)
Royal Armed Forces 1 (Samadi 35)
Royal Armed Forces won 3-1 on agg

Semi-finals

Etoile Sahel 3 (Riadh Jelassi 31, Boukadida 72, Imed Ben Younes 81)
Mansoura 0

Mansoura 4 (Bedier El-Sherbini 19, pen 89, Walid Salah 53, Ayman Moheb 75)
Etoile Sahel 2 (Samir Raouene 15, Imed Ben Younes 88)
Etoile Sahel won 5-4 on agg

Royal Armed Forces 3 (Samadi 13, 40, 66)
St Louisienne 0

St Louisienne 2
Royal Armed Forces 2
RAF won 5-2 on agg

Final

Etoile Sahel 2 (Imed Mhedhibi 42, Imed Ben Younes 76) **Royal Armed Forces 0**

Royal Armed Forces 1 (Abdeloauhad Chamami 28)
Etoile Sahel 0
Etoile Sahel won 2-1 on agg

CAF CUP

Quarter-finals

DSA 0 Jasper United 0

Jasper United 2 (Chris Onyekuru pen 38, Ifeanyi Ekwueme 65)
DSA 0
Jasper United won 2-0 on agg

Petro Atletico 2 (Alexio 43, 64)
USM Ein Beida 0

USM Ein Beida 1 (Abdoulaye Ba 32)
Petro Atletico 3 (Matias 58, Guedes 67, Paulo Silva 85)
Petro won 5-1 on agg
Kampala City Council 2 (Jackson Mayanja 74, 81)
AFC Leopards 2 (Fred Ambani 4, David Odhiambo 59)
AFC Leopards 0
Kampala City Council 1 (Geoffrey Mugisha 40)
KCC won 3-2 on agg

Esperance 4 (Ziad Tiemcani 10, 75, Ayed Hamrouni 22, Tarek Thabet 46)
Cotonsport 1 (Eyoum 50)

Cotonsport 3 (Ndo 25, Baba Yaro 44, 69)
Esperance 1 (Sahbani 88)
Esperance won 5-4 on agg

Semi-finals

Jasper United 2
Petro Atletico 1

Petro Atletico 4 (Jonas 29, 62, Paulo Silva 33, 77)
Jasper United 1 (Paul Kpoughol 82)
Petro won 5-3 on aggregate

AFC Leopards 1 (Baker Mbowa 75)
Esperance 3 (Ziad Tiemcani 20, Laroussi 41, Ayed Hamrouni 65)

Esperance 6 (Ziad Tiemcani 6, 38, Radhi Seaydi 29, Mohamed Badraoui 44, Hassan Gabsi 78, 87)
Kampala City Council 0
Esperance won 9-1 on aggregate

Final

Petro Atletico 1 (Paulo Silva 80)
Esperance 0

Esperance 2 (Ziad Tiemanci 10, Khaled Badra 46)
Petro Atletico 0
Esperance won 2-1 on aggregate

1998 DRAWS

CUP-WINNERS CUP

Preliminary rnd

Wolaita Tussaa (Ethiopia) v Red Sea (Eritrea); Benin representative v Gazelle (Chad); Notwane (Botswana) v Bantu (Lesotho); Tanzania Stars (Tanzania) v Bata Bullets (Malawi); Rwanda FC v Seychelles representative; Congo representative v TP USCA Bangui (Central African Republic); Vital'O (Burundi) v El Nguema (Equatorial Guinea).
Team mentioned first plays at home in the first leg on the weekend of January 30-31 and February 1. The return legs are on the weekend of February 13-15.

1st rnd

Mozambique representative v Eldoret (Kenya); Ismailia (Egypt) v Wolaita Tussaa or Red Sea BCC; Lions (Nigeria) v Benin representative or Gazelle; Africa Sports (Ivory Coast) v Togo representative; Primeiro Agosto (Angola) v Notwane or Bantu; Reunion representative v Fire Brigade (Mauritius); Kaizer Chiefs (South Africa) v Tanzania Stars or Bata Bullets; Zambia representative v Rwanda FC or Seychelles representative; Esperance (Tunisia) v Mali representative; Al Murada (Sudan) v Express (Uganda); USM Alger (Algeria) v Hawks (Gambia); Ghapoha (Ghana) v ASF Bobo Dioulasso (Burkina Faso); Wydad Casablanca (Morocco) v Senegal representative; Union Douala (Cameroon) v Congo representative or TP USCA; Bangui Dragons (DR Congo) v Vital'O or El Nguema; AS Kaloum (Guinea) v Mbilinga (Gabon)
Teams mentioned first play at home in the first leg on the weekend of March 20-22 with the return legs on the weekend of April 3-5.

CAF CUP

Preliminary rnd

APR FC (Rwanda) v Asmara Beer (Eritrea); Anges de Fatima (Central African Republic) v Atletico Malabo (Equatorial Guinea)
Team mentioned first plays at home in the first leg on the weekend of January 30-31 and February 1. The return legs are on the weekend of February 13-15.

1st rnd

APR FC or Asmara Beer v Al Hilal (Sudan); Gor Mahia (Kenya) v Zamalek (Egypt); Muzinga (Burundi) v Cotontchad (Chad); ASFA Yennega (Burkina Faso) v Jasper United (Nigeria); Costa do Sol (Mozambique) v DSA (Madagascar); Umeme (Uganda) v Caps

No 1...Raja won the Champions League

United (Zimbabwe); Mlandege (Tanzania) v EELPA (Ethiopia); Zambia representative v Botswana representative; Anges de Fatima or Atletico Malabo v Stade Bandjoun (Cameroon); Sagrada Esperanca (Angola) v DC Motema Pembe (DR Congo); USFAS (Mali) v Renaissance Settat (Morocco); Horoya (Guinea) v Real Tamale United (Ghana); Jeanne d'Arc (Senegal) v Mouloudia Oran (Algeria); Petrosport (Gabon) v Congo representative; Togo representative v CS Sfaxien (Tunisia); Benin representative v SO Armee (Ivory Coast)
Teams mentioned first play at home in the first leg on the weekend of March 20-22 with the return legs on the weekend of April 3-5.

AFRICAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Preliminary rnd

St Michel United (Seychelles) v Coffee FC (Ethiopia); Rayon Sport (Rwanda) v Maniema (Burundi); Telecom Wanderers (Malawi) v Botswana Defence Force XI (Botswana); Mbabane Swallows (Swaziland) v Lesotho Defence Force XI (Lesotho); Medlow Megbi (Eritrea) v Utali (Kenya); St Louissienne (Reunion) v Sunrise SC (Mauritius); Desportivo (Equatorial Guinea) v Congo representative; Wallidan (Gambia) v AS Douanes (Senegal); Mogas 90 (Benin) v East End Lions (Sierra Leone); Tempete Mocaf (Central African Republic) v Tourbillon (Chad)
Teams mentioned first play at home in the first leg on the weekend of March 20-22 with the return legs on the weekend of April 3-5.

1st rnd

St Michel United or Coffee FC v Al Ahli (Egypt); Rayon Sport or Maniema v Young Africans (Tanzania); Telecom Wanderers or Botswana Defence Force XI v Dynamos (Zimbabwe); St Louissienne or Sunrise SC v Ferroviario Maputo (Mozambique); Kampala City Council (Uganda) v Power Dynamos (Zambia); Mbabane Swallows or Lesotho Defence Force XI v Manning Rangers (South Africa); Medlow Megbi or Utali v Al Merreikh (Sudan); Kamsar (Guinea) v Etoile Sahel (Tunisia); Desportivo or Congo representative v Petro Atletico (Angola); Eagle Cement (Nigeria) v Vita Club (Zaire); Racing (Burkina Faso) v ASEC Abidjan (Ivory Coast); Togo representative v FC 105 Libreville (Gabon); Wallidan or Douanes v CS Constantine (Algeria); Mogas 90 or East End Lions v Raja Casablanca (Morocco); Tempete Mocaf or Tourbillon v Cotonsport (Cameroon); Djoliba (Mali) v Hearts of Oak (Ghana)
Teams mentioned first play at home in the first legs on the weekend of March 21-23. The return legs will be on the weekend of April 3-5.

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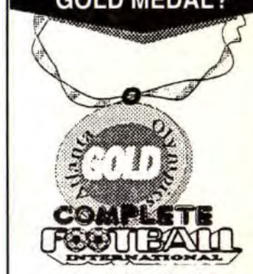

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Brian Glanville's LAST WORD

Re-introduction...Tottenham chairman Alan Sugar (left) at the media conference which marked Jurgen Klinsmann's second coming

Educating Sugar

WHETHER Jurgen Klinsmann can save Spurs from the drop, and whether Spurs can enable Klinsmann to keep his place in Germany's World Cup attack, remains to be seen. The jury may well stay out for a while.

What is beyond doubt is that what might be called The Klinsmann Affair has notably humbled and domesticated Alan Sugar, Tottenham Hotspur's once-abrasive chairman.

To hear Sugar, at the packed media conference which greeted Klinsmann on his unexpected return, admit he had been "naive about football contracts" was the stuff of revelation, and sheer comedy.

Sugar naive about contracts, contracts of any kind? Sugar, who had forcefully, some would say ruthlessly, built up his computer business from the depths of the East End, Sugar who had heaped scorn, abuse and contumely on Klinsmann when he dared to leave Tottenham after only one year of a two-year contract!

Sugar had announced that he would not even clean his car with the Tottenham jersey Klinsmann had left him. Sugar would speak so scornfully of Carlos Kickaballs, the mercenary foreigners who battened like parasites on the body of English football. Sugar in his earlier time at Tottenham seemed to feel he was right about anything and everything. Sugar had somehow neglected to read, or digest, the small print of a contract which quite certainly enabled Klinsmann to leave after a year.

'To hear Sugar, at the media conference which greeted Klinsmann, admit he had been "naive about football contracts" was the stuff of revelation, and sheer comedy'

Given Klinsmann's troubled record, his frequent moves from club to European club, such a departure was surely in the wind from the beginning.

I have not, for some time, found Sugar an antipathetic figure. I enjoy his hard, East End humour and accept that he knows a great deal more about football than his detractors are prepared to believe. But he was at first an overbearing figure in his new incarnation as a soccer chairman – albeit Tottenham's financial saviour – convinced like so many self-made men that he could go into football with all the intransigence he showed in the business world.

Like so many self-made soccer chairmen before him, he discovered that this was another world, and one that could not be so easily manipulated.

I recall, in particular, the Gino Santin saga. Santin, a London restaurateur who also acts as a football agent, had been paid some £200,000 after Paul Gascoigne's transfer from Tottenham to Lazio. Sugar insisted that the payment was not only excessive but unwarranted. At a time when he and the manager, Terry Venables, were at daggers drawn, the implications were clear.

Then I learned from Italian contacts that Santin had played an absolutely crucial role in the transfer. Indeed, negotiations several times would have broken down without Santin's skilful diplomacy.

This episode, too, may have played a part in what one might call The Education of Alan Sugar. But Sugar naive? Perish the thought!

Owen's growing pains

GLENN HODDLE's public critique of the gloriously talented Michael Owen, who had only just turned 18 and made his debut for England Under-21s, was strangely rash and ill-considered.

Poor Owen, we were told, was not yet "the finished article" – as if we did not know – and must get his act together both on and off the field.

Perhaps Hoddle, who was quickly rebuked by Liverpool manager Roy Evans and by Owen's father, was simply trying to cool the euphoria which Owen's performances had engendered, leading to calls for him to be included in the World Cup party. If so, it was clumsily done.

For rare talents such as Owen's need to be nurtured, not disparaged. Goodness knows we have few enough young English players of real quality. Owen is one, Emile Heskey of Leicester is another. So are West Ham's Rio Ferdinand and Everton's 18-year-old striker, the swift and powerful Danny Cadamarteri.

Like Owen, Cadamarteri cannot be intimidated by heftier, older opponents, though I would certainly like to see both better protected by referees than they were in matches at Arsenal (Owen) and Leicester (Cadamarteri).

Two painful challenges on Owen by Martin Keown brought no more than bounce-ups from a feebly permissive referee. Cadamarteri was flattened by what looked very much like an elbow.

Hoddle surely should reflect on his own international debut, a dazzling performance at Wembley against Bulgaria which was crowned by a superb goal. Whereupon 'Uncle' Ron Greenwood, supposedly the prophet and progenitor of creative football, promptly dropped him, saying, "Disappointment is part of football."

Precious talent...Liverpool's Michael Owen

Time to go...FIFA president Joao Havelange

Farewell, and not before time

THIS, God willing, is the year when we shall at last see the back of Joao Havelange after his 24 deplorable years as president of FIFA. Years in which the World Cup, bloated from 16 to 24 to 32 teams, went to Mexico instead of Colombia, to the benefit of Emilio Ascarraga of Televisa Mexicana, who flew Havelange out of Spain when the 1982 event was over. Years when Havelange, thanks to the spineless passivity of FIFA's delegates, managed to stay in office virtually unopposed, a great dictator.

When he goes, let us piously hope that Sepp (51 bad ideas a day) Blatter goes, too. His latest impertinence has been to demand that the major European countries cut their championships to 16 teams each. An admirable idea in its way, were the final product to be less football. But that's not what Blatter wants.

He and FIFA are pushing for the lunacy of a world club tournament which would drag in teams, many of them inevitably mediocre, from all the confederations.

Meanwhile, Blatter wants the ludicrous, irrelevant and – for clubs who lose star players – iniquitous Confederations Cup to be extended, which means clubs will lose stars for even more matches.

As Inter lost Ronaldo and were beaten 1-0 by Udinese, Brazil were knocking six past Australia in Riyadh, three of them going to Inter's young centre-forward, Ronaldo.

Havelange's hopes that Argentina's federation president, Grondona, would succeed him appear to have foundered and there seems every chance that the post will go to Lennart Johansson, Swedish president of UEFA. This will elicit from me not three cheers, but perhaps one and a half.

It is hard to think of anybody as arrogant, overweening (remember the way he tried to boss and bully his executive committee four years ago in the USA?) and autocratic as Havelange. But Johansson's tenure at UEFA has coincided with the adulteration of the once-splendid European Cup, now sabotaged by a half-baked league system, and opened alas to eight second-placed teams from the major countries.

When Havelange ran successfully against Stanley Rous for the FIFA presidency in 1974, in Frankfurt, my colleague Keith Botsford wrote in the *Sunday Times* of "small brown envelopes going into large black hands". Havelange did all he could to get the Africans on board.

Johansson, by contrast, insulted them deplorably on his return from a trip to Africa, with remarks he never thought would be repeated. Will they come back to haunt him?

Maybe so, but the odds at the moment seem to be in his favour.

On the defensive...Martin O'Neill

Smarting Martin

MANAGERS puzzle me at times. That talented, well-educated, likeable young Leicester City manager, Martin O'Neill, told us after his team had lost 2-1 at Highbury, besieging Arsenal at the finish, that HE had believed his team could win, but had found it hard to convince his players.

In that case, I asked him, why had he adopted such defensive tactics, using Pontus Kaamark, usually his right wing-back, to man-mark Dennis Bergkamp?

An irate O'Neill told me he was astounded: his team's performance had nothing remotely to do with the formation, which was simply the same 3-5-2 as always.

But it wasn't. With Kaamark following Bergkamp, Robbie Savage had to drop back to make up the back three, and once even cleared off the line.

Leicester, in the event, paid excessive respect to an Arsenal team who went 2-0 ahead – the second a daft own goal by Steve Walsh – but were desperately on the ropes at the end.

O'Neill properly called it a grandstand finish, and emphasised that attacking thus means running risks. But attacking always does, and begging the tactical question does not supply the definitive answer.

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France 98

INTRODUCTION

JUNE 10, 1998, 4.30pm. Remember the date, remember the time. Holders Brazil will kick off against Scotland in the Stade de France in the Opening Match of the 16th World Cup finals.

Thirty-three days, 64 games and all manner of joyful and painful experiences later, the winners of the greatest prize on Planet Earth will be known.

With 32 finalists, France 98 will be the biggest World Cup finals ever, but will it be the best? Certainly, the omens are promising. There will not be the time differences and associated travel problems that so affected players and fans alike in the USA four years ago. The stadiums should be full. And the French convivial hosts.

Which just leaves the small matter of previewing the teams. This booklet, the first of four presented free with WORLD SOCCER, will, we hope, give you everything you need to prepare for the finals. We bring it to you without favouritism to any country, but instead with the inside knowledge gained from almost 40 years of reporting on international football from all corners of the globe.

Let WORLD SOCCER be your guide to preparations for the world's greatest tournament. Between now and June 10, the talk will be of little else.

Gavin Hamilton

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Argentina

Still searching for a blend

Eric Weil examines the problems facing Argentina coach Daniel Passarella

ARGENTINA were among the countries who complained at the long South American qualifying tournament of 16 matches, mainly because of the problems in getting their many European-based internationals. But in the end it worked in their favour.

The double World Cup-winners started badly and at one time it even looked as if they would not qualify for their 12th finals. However, they rose to the occasion in the latter part of the tournament to win the group with five victories in a row before drawing with Uruguay and Colombia at home in the final games, by which time they had already qualified.

Team manager Daniel Passarella made continual changes in an effort to find a winning combination and used 46 players (including six goalkeepers) in the 16 games. Uniquely, in the match against Uruguay, he lined up an entire team of European-based players.

Argentina's only two defeats came in Quito, Ecuador (2,800 metres above sea level) and La Paz, Bolivia (3,600m), and Passarella's fear of playing at altitude seemed to affect the players. So much so that Chile at first considered playing Argentina in Calama, which stands at a height of 2,800 metres.

Argentina also showed their ugly side in the defeat of Bolivia, where a brawl held up play for 10 minutes. They were lucky to have only three players suspended.

That seemed to have done the Argentinians more good than bad, however, for they won the next five games, including away victories over Paraguay and Chile, who had 100 per cent home records until then.

After fielding a five-man defence in Bolivia to no avail, Passarella generally changed to a three-man defence and a 3-2-2-3 line-up for the rest of the way, but apart from changing personnel he also varied tactics from match to match. This is OK if it is done to suit needs against different rivals, but there are doubts whether the coach has found his ideal combination and ideal tactics to stand up against stronger and different opposition in the finals.

There is no doubt that Argentina have some outstanding players – many of whom have fetched high prices on the European market – but they have yet to show consistent team form against strong opposition.

The coach has been very hard on goalkeepers, not forgiving them a single mistake. None has really disappointed, but none is of the high class the country has been famous for in the past. A case in point was German Burgos, who played a blinder against Ecuador and was chiefly responsible for gaining Argentina an away point in Peru. Then an error in the next game left him not even on the bench for the following match.

Carlos Roa was the chosen one for the last seven games – the successful run-in during which, of course, he did not have all that much to do, letting in four goals but not displeasing the coach.

There is experience in defence with Roberto Ayala, Nestor Sensini and Fernando Caceres – the three who lined up in the last qualifying game against Colombia – plus Jose Chamot, Hernan Diaz and Javier Zanetti all potential starters. Four of them played in the 1994 World Cup. There are other excellent candidates such as Pablo Paz and Juan Sorin.

Ayala is libero, Sensini and Chamot the stoppers to look after the opposition's danger men. Paz is a good marker while Diaz and Sorin are good at moving into attack.

The midfielders, all attacking, are outstanding and all have scored some good goals – speedy Juan Veron, World Cup veteran Diego Simeone, excellent ball controller Ariel Ortega (the only one picked for all 16 games, although he missed one through injury) and Marcelo Gallardo.

There is strength in depth too, with the experienced Matias Almeyda, Leonardo Astrada, Gustavo Zapata and Sergio Berti among others who could all be starters.

Argentina's problems are all in attack. They have some outstanding players who can score plenty of goals – but find it difficult to do so in the national team. Only 23 goals were scored in the 16 qualifying matches and Argentina must be the champions of missed chances.

Gabriel Batistuta, Abel Balbo and Hernan Crespo are all leading scorers in Italy, while Claudio Lopez does his bit in Spain. The last two played most regularly in qualifying games and missed incredible chances. Batistuta, the national team's all-time leading scorer with 36 goals, played six times and was then strangely forgotten until the last game. Balbo was picked only three times.

No attack combination worked properly, and even Ortega was tried up front with no more success. Others such as Julio Cruz and Juan Esnaider were rarely given a chance. Passarella says Batistuta and Crespo don't hit it off and people are saying he prefers Crespo because he brought him up when coaching River Plate.

Passarella always liked 1994 World Cup striker Claudio Caniggia who, however, has not been playing much lately, mostly due to injury.

Another 1994 player, midfielder Fernando Redondo, is not likely to be in the squad. He and Passarella do not see eye to eye on certain matters, such as the length of his hair and the position he wants to play in.

Passarella called up 10 home-based players for his January training camp – goalkeepers Burgos and Pablo Cavallero, defenders Diaz and Nelson Vivas, midfielders Juan Riquelme, Christian Bassedas, Astrada, Berti and Gallardo, and striker Marcelo Delgado. The rest of the final squad places are likely to be filled by players with foreign clubs.

Argentina expect to play nine warm-up matches against stronger opposition before the World Cup, including world champions Brazil in Rio on April 29 and other World Cup finalists Italy, Morocco, Belgium, France and Holland.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 Runners-up
1934 1st round
1938 Did not enter
1954 Did not enter
1958 1st round
1962 1st round
1966 Quarter-finalists
1970 Did not qualify
1974 2nd round
1978 Winners
1982 2nd round
1986 Winners
1990 Runners-up
1994 2nd round
Total games Played 52 Won 26 Drawn 9 Lost 17 Goals for 90 Goals against 65

How they qualified

SOUTH AMERICAN SECTION

24.04.96 .....Argentina-Bolivia 3-1
02.06.96 .....Ecuador-Argentina 2-0
07.07.96 .....Peru-Argentina.....0-0
01.09.96 .....Argentina-Paraguay 1-1
09.10.96 .....Venezuela-Argentina.....2-5
05.12.96 .....Argentina-Chile.....1-1
12.01.97 .....Uruguay-Argentina.....0-0
12.02.97 .....Colombia-Argentina.....0-1
02.04.97 .....Bolivia-Argentina 2-1
30.04.97 .....Argentina-Ecuador 2-1
08.06.97 .....Argentina-Peru.....2-0
06.07.97 .....Paraguay-Argentina 1-2
20.07.97 .....Argentina-Venezuela.....2-0
10.09.97 .....Chile-Argentina.....1-2
12.10.97 .....Argentina-Uruguay.....0-0
16.11.97 .....Argentina-Colombia 1-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
***Argentina**	**16**	**8**	**6**	**2**	**23**	**13**	**30**
Paraguay	**16**	**9**	**2**	**5**	**21**	**14**	**29**
Colombia	**16**	**8**	**4**	**4**	**23**	**15**	**28**
Chile	**16**	**7**	**4**	**5**	**32**	**18**	**25**
Peru	**16**	**7**	**4**	**5**	**19**	**20**	**25**
Ecuador	**16**	**6**	**3**	**7**	**22**	**21**	**21**
Uruguay	**16**	**6**	**3**	**7**	**18**	**21**	**21**
Bolivia	**16**	**4**	**5**	**7**	**18**	**21**	**17**
Venezuela	**16**	**0**	**3**	**13**	**8**	**41**	**3**

**Qualified as group winners*

Players used in qualifiers

Fifteen appearances Ortega.
Thirteen Simeone.
Twelve Almeyda, Ayala, Claudio Lopez, Sensini.
Ten Crespo.
Nine Chamot, Paz, Veron, Zanetti.
Seven Batistuta, Morales, Roa.
Six Berti.
Five Diaz.
Four Bassedas, Berizzo, Gallardo, Vivas, Zapata.
Three Albornoz, Balbo, Caceres, Caniggia, Gonzalez, Sorin.
Two Astrada, Burgos, Calderon, Cavallero, Gorosito, Gustavo Lopez.
One Borelli, Bossio, Cagna, Campos, Cardoso, Cruz, Delgado, Esnaider, Molina, Passet, Posse, Riquelme, Schelotto.

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Five Ortega. **Four** Batistuta. **Three** Crespo. **Two** Sorin. **One** Cacares, Claudio Lopez, Gallardo, Gorosito, Paz, Simeone, Veron.

Captain turned coach...Daniel Passarella

THE COACH

Daniel PASSARELLA
Now aged 44, Passarella was captain of Argentina's 1978 World Cup winners and in his country's squad for the next two World Cups, earning a total of 71 caps and scoring 24 goals. As a player with River Plate, Passarella played 298 League games, scoring 90 goals – a record for a defender – winning seven Argentinian League titles between 1974 and 1981. Then, as coach from 1989 to 1993, he won three further championships with the club. He is known as a disciplinarian, and has banned long hair, earrings and homosexuals from the national team. He will however allow players to take wives and girlfriends to the World Cup finals, but not the training camp. Having been a defender, Passarella has been found to lack attacking tactics.

GOALKEEPERS

German BURGOS
Date of birth: 16.4.69. Club: River Plate. 6 caps.
The most experienced of the goalkeepers available to Passarella. Played in only two qualifying games and gave an outstanding performance in the first, but made a mistake (which cost a goal) in the second and was dropped. Is still liable to be the safest under pressure.

Pablo CAVALLERO
13.4.74. Velez Sarsfield. 2 caps. Reserve at his club to Paraguayan Jose Luis Chilavert, but still caught Passarella's eye. First choice at the 1996 Olympics. Played in two qualifiers, then was replaced by Roa.

Carlos ROA
15.8.69. Mallorca (Spa). 7 caps. Formerly with Lanus. Played in the last seven qualifiers in which he did not have too much to do to retain his place as number one after five other keepers had been rejected.

DEFENDERS

Roberto AYALA
14.4.73. Napoli (Ita). 31 caps. Formerly with River Plate, an experienced libero and regular who won silver medal in 1996 Olympics. Good in the air.

Fernando CACERES
7.2.69. Valencia (Spa). 21 caps (1 gl). Another veteran in an experienced defence, Caceres is a flank defender with an eye for goals who has not been called up much since – because, Passarella said, he knew the ex-Boca Juniors player's value.

Jose CHAMOT
17.5.69. Lazio (Ita). 32 caps (2 gls). The other regular experienced stopper from the 1994 World Cup finals who also played at the 1996 Olympic Games.

Hernan DIAZ
26.1.65. River Plate. 25 caps (3 gls). Probable first-choice flank defender with plenty of experience who also played in the 1994 World Cup, but temperament earns him cards.

Pablo PAZ
27.1.73. Tenerife (Spa). 10 caps (1 gl). A good marker and stopper, generally sub for tired defenders. Won Olympic silver in 1996. A favourite with Passarella although other defenders are more experienced.

Nestor SENSINI
14.4.73. Parma (Ita). 45 caps. Experienced stopper and another regular who played in the 94 finals. Generally marks the most dangerous attacker. Olympic silver medallist.

Juan Pablo SORIN
19.9.76. River Plate. 7 caps (2 gls). Useful young reserve flank defender who played as a sub in WC qualifiers and is still improving.

Nelson VIVAS
18.10.69. Boca Juniors. 8 caps. A good flank defender who is at his best when attacking. Likely to be chosen as a sub.

Javier ZANETTI
10.8.73. Inter (Ita). 29 caps (1 gl). Fast flank defender, good at taking ball out of defence and starting attacks, and good ball control. Played nine WC qualifiers, but was not in starting lineup in the latter stages when the team started to click.

MIDFIELDERS

Matias ALMEYDA
21.12.73. Lazio (Ita). 11 caps. Outstanding attacking half with good technique but not always in Passarella's starting lineup. Another of several internationals brought to prominence by Passarella when he was River Plate coach. Played in 1996 Olympic team.

Leonardo ASTRADA
6.1.70. River Plate. 28 caps. Alternates with Almeyda in attacking half position. Played in only two qualifiers because Passarella knows his capabilities well.

Christian BASSEDAS
16.2.73. Velez Sarsfield. 27 caps. Another useful midfielder who put in some good performances in the 1996 Olympic team, but may not make the World Cup squad due to the abundance of players in his position.

Sergio BERTI
17.2.69. River Plate. 15 caps (3 gls). Dynamic attacking midfielder generally used as a sub.

Rodolfo CARDOSO
17.10.68. Hamburg (Ger). 2 caps. German-based midfielder used in one qualifier, but unlikely to make final 22.

Marcelo GALLARDO
9.3.75. River Plate. 19 caps (10 gls). Dynamic attacking midfielder generally sent on as sub. Played in six WC qualifying games.

Ariel ORTEGA
4.3.74. Valencia (Spa). 39 caps (7 gls). Arguably the star of the team and closest to being successor to Diego Maradona – for whom he was sub in the 1994 World Cup. Possesses outstanding ball control, playmaking skills and a sharp eye for goal. Silver medal at 1996 Olympics and was leading scorer in World Cup qualifying with five goals.

Juan RIQUELME
24.6.78. Boca Juniors. 1 cap. The revelation of the recent opening championship in Argentina, where he played a prominent role in helping Boca to clinch second place despite his tender age. His only appearance in the national team so far was in the last few minutes of the final France 98 qualifier against Colombia.

Diego SIMEONE
28.4.70. Inter (Ita). 60 caps (10 gls). Most capped player in the team and occasional captain, good marker and passer, but more a defender and no longer a certainty. Played in last WC and Olympic silver medal team.

Juan Sebastian VERON
9.3.75. Sampdoria (Ita). 10 caps (1 gl). Son of winger 'La Bruja' Veron of Estudiantes de La Plata and Libertadores Cup fame. One of the outstanding new successes, dynamic with fast midfield movement and to be watched in attack.

Gustavo ZAPATA
15.10.67. San Lorenzo. 20 caps (2 gls). A likely reserve who played four times during WC qualifying.

FORWARDS

Abel BALBO
1.6.66. Roma (Ita). 30 caps (11 gls). Another leading goalscorer in Italy and WC 1994 veteran who has had few chances in the national team lately, playing only three WC qualifiers.

Gabriel BATISTUTA
1.2.69. Fiorentina (Ita). 52 caps (36 gls).
Needs no introduction, having played in 1994 World Cup. Nicknamed Batigol, and with good reason – he has twice been leading scorer in the Italian League and is the national team's highest scorer ever with 36 goals. Despite this, Passarella surprisingly left him out after the early qualifying games and only brought him back for the last game, his seventh. A born scorer, always near goal, he does not get the right service or space (created by team-mates) when playing for the national team.

Claudio CANIGGIA
9.1.67. Boca Juniors. 52 caps (15 gls). Will be picked if he recovers 94 WC form, which is doubtful. Has played very little soccer during the last two years after a series of injuries.

Hernan CRESPO
5.7.75. Parma (Ita). 13 caps (3 gls). Another brought up by Passarella at River Plate. Rarely produces his league form and goals for the national team, but continues to be first choice and the coach is looking for his best partner in attack. Olympic silver medallist.

Marcelo DELGADO
24.3.73. Racing Club. 4 caps. Leading scorer in the last Olympic qualifiers (8 goals in 7 games) and then silver medallist, but has had few chances in the full squad, playing only one France 98 qualifier.

Juan Eduardo ESNAIDER
5.3.73. Espanyol (Spa). 3 caps (1 gl). Has been given few chances – only one WC qualifier – in which he failed to repeat club form.

Claudio LOPEZ
17.7.74. Valencia (Spa). 15 caps (2 gls). Played in 12 qualifying games after winning 1996 Olympic silver. Fast and dangerous, but his shooting is often found wanting.

Batigol...Record goalscorer Gabriel Batistuta

Austria

Just happy to be there

Little is expected of Herbert Prohaska's side in France, says Bob Vaughan

AUSTRIA are just happy to be back on the World Cup scene. The national team have been absent from the big time too often in the 20 years since their elimination of the Germans in Argentina in 1978 – a first victory over the old enemy since 5-0 and 6-0 successes in 1931.

Things have often been far too good or far too bad – something that applies to Austrian life in general as well as the World Cup down the years.

Despite being founder members of FIFA and having the legendary Hugo Meisl in charge, Austria did not take part in the first World Cup, in Uruguay in 1930, but four years later fourth place was no bad debut.

Austrian players were incorporated in a 'Gross-Deutschland' team in 1938, so a whole new generation was on the scene by the time of the 1950 finals, but there was no money, no music, as the Viennese say, to take part. Absence from Rio was particularly bitter. A new 'wunderteam' had been developed, but sadly the team peaked between 1949 and 1952 and was slightly over the hill come Switzerland in 1954. After eliminating the Scots and the Czechoslovaks in the first stage, the Swiss were beaten 7-5 in Lausanne in a memorable quarter-final. A catastrophe against the Germans in the semis followed before Uruguay were beaten in the third-place play-off.

The ups and downs continued. In 1958, elimination from an impossible group featuring Brazil, England and the USSR. Failure to qualify for the 1966 and 1970 finals. Even more bitter was losing to Sweden in a play-off for the 1974 finals.

A first finals in Latin America, in 1978, at last brought some joy, with defeats by Holland, Italy and Brazil, but victory over West Germany, 3-2 in Cordoba. Many of the heroes from that match were still present to secure qualification for Spain in 1982, a finals marked by the much-criticised Austria 0 West Germany 1, which enabled both to qualify for phase two.

Italia 90 again proved too much, with only the USA accounted for, while 1986 and 1994 were notable blanks. So Austria's chances of qualifying for France this time around were not rated very highly when the draw grouped them with Scotland and Sweden. Domestic football had been given a shot in the arm by Salzburg's surprising run to the UEFA Cup Final in 1994, but generally the Austrian League looked wanting as the qualifying games began. Club mergers were on the horizon and most of the national team mainstays were performing in Germany and Spain.

Could coach Herbert Prohaska add to the previous six qualifications, which had brought two semi-final and two quarter-final appearances? He had failed to lift his team to the finals of Euro 96 despite beating the Republic of Ireland 3-1 home and away. A wet and windy night was the Austrians' downfall in Group 6.

Prohaska's stool had wobbled, but he was still in office at the beginning of the France 98 campaign. At his disposal were a mixture of Rapid, FK Austria and Salzburg players at home, veterans such as Feiersinger (in Dortmund), Herzog (Werder Bremen) and Polster (Koln), but not many youthful talents coming through.

Failure again to beat a British team at home – this time Scotland – looked ominous, but minor tinkering with the selection surprisingly brought an away win in Sweden, when Herzog's goal after 12 minutes sufficed. Scoring power was clearly going to be the main problem; Polster only managed one against Latvia in the second home tie, but Herzog's 73rd minute winner meant Prohaska had scrambled another three points.

There was defeat (and no goals) against Slovenia before the visit to Parkhead, where a defeat by Scotland proved to be the last of the campaign. Thereafter wins in the Baltic and Minsk, and at home to Sweden and Belarus, completed the job and gave the record in qualifying a respectable look. Statistics, however, should not always be believed. Of Austria's 17 goals in qualifying, two were scored in four games against Scotland and Sweden, 15 against Latvia, Estonia and Belarus.

So Prohaska has to find a solution to the problem of scoring against quality opposition. Toni Polster, approaching Hanappi's record of 93 caps, is no spring chicken, but will still be needed in France as his couplet in the final qualifying match against Belarus demonstrated. He was responsible for nearly half the goals in Austria's successful run to the top of Group 4, and if he or Herzog should not be available, it is difficult to see where Prohaska will find replacements.

"It is true I need them both," the coach said on qualifying. "Their experience from playing in Germany shows. We shall have opposition as tough as Scotland or Sweden, whoever the opposition proves to be in France." That looks to be the case with Italy, one of Austria's oldest foes, an unpredictable Cameroon, once Africa's finest but currently in transition, and Chile, like Austria in their seventh finals appearance.

Prohaska has work to do. First there is the lengthy winter break and the need to arrange friendlies in the spring. His top performers – Polster, Herzog and Feiersinger in Germany – will have little respite, likewise Konsel at AS Roma. Indeed, the spine of the starting 11 is likely to be foreign-based.

There is no shortage of class in goal. Konsel seems to have the nod at present but Wohlfahrt, who wanted to play in England before winning the German Cup with Stuttgart, has his supporters. Otto Konrad or Arsenal's Alex Manninger will be rivals for the third spot.

Defenders should more or less pick themselves – sweeper Feiersinger, stoppers Pfeffer and Schottel – and the midfield looks to have six contenders for four positions. Alternatives at the sharp end are fewer.

Nevertheless, Austria will go into the tournament with the nothing-to-lose spirit with which the qualifying campaign was played. Few would have gambled on topping a group which included Scotland and Sweden after the modest performances of recent years.

Qualifying at least laid the ghosts of the Faroe Isles, and perhaps the second phase can be reached or – just maybe – even better. Prohaska will have done well if he can make the quarter-finals, but such a suggestion is a trifle on the optimistic side.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 Did not enter; **1934** Semi-finalists/4th place; **1938** Did not enter; **1950** Did not enter; **1954** Semi-finalists/3rd place; **1958** 1st round; **1962** Did not enter; **1966** Did not qualify; **1970** Did not qualify; **1974** Did not qualify; **1978** 2nd round; **1982** 2nd round; **1986** Did not qualify; **1990** 1st round; **1994** Did not qualify

Total Played 26 Won 12 Drawn 2 Lost 12 Goals for 40 Goals against 43.

How they qualified

EUROPEAN SECTION GROUP 4

31.08.96....Austria-Scotland.....0-0
09.10.96....Sweden-Austria.....0-1
09.11.96....Austria-Latvia.....2-1
02.04.97....Scotland-Austria.....2-0
30.04.97....Austria-Estonia.....2-0
08.06.97....Latvia-Austria.....1-3
20.08.97....Estonia-Austria.....0-3
06.09.97....Austria-Sweden.....1-0
10.09.97....Belarus-Austria.....0-1
11.10.97....Austria-Belarus.....4-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
***Austria**	**10**	**8**	**1**	**1**	**17**	**4**	**25**
Scotland	10	7	2	1	15	3	23
Sweden	10	7	0	3	16	9	21
Latvia	10	3	1	6	10	14	10
Estonia	10	1	1	8	4	16	4
Belarus	10	1	1	8	5	21	4

**Qualified as group winners*

Players used in qualifers

Ten appearances Herzog, Polster.
Nine Konsel, Stoger.
Eight Feiersinger, Pfeffer, Schottel.
Six Cerny, Heraf, Schopp, Vastic.
Five Kuhbauer, Pfeifenberger, Ramusch, Wetl.
Four Kogler, Mahlich, Prilasnig.
Three Hutter.
Two Wohlfahrt.
One Aigner, Hatz, Kartalija, Marasek, Ogris, Reinmayr, Sabitzer.

Goalscorers in qualifers

Seven Polster.
Four Stoger.
Three Herzog.
One Heraf, Pfeifenberger, Vastic.

High achiever...Herbert Prohaska

THE COACH

Herbert PROHASKA

As a player, Prohaska was a winner, taking four League titles with FK Austria before moving to Italy, where he helped Roma to become champions in 1982-83. He also played 80 times for his country and appeared at two World Cup finals. After turning to coaching just before his 35th birthday, Prohaska then led FK Austria to three League titles. He made quick progress at national coaching level, leading the country's Under-21 side before becoming coach of the full national team in January 1993. Whether the 42-year-old survives in the position will depend on how Austria perform in France. One thing is certain, however. There is nothing he may ask his squad to do that he was incapable of doing as a player.

GOALKEEPERS

Otto KONRAD

Date of birth: 1.11.64. Club: SV Salzburg. 12 caps.

Played large part in Salzburg's progress to UEFA Cup Final three years ago, but has not played for national side for two seasons and may lose third goalkeeper spot to Alex Manninger of Arsenal.

Michael KONSEL

6.3.62. Roma (Ita). 36 caps.

Agile but not the tallest of keepers. Appears to be No 1 having played in all Austria's games last season. Now in Serie A with Roma after making a surprise move from Rapid at the age of 35.

Franz WOHLFAHRT

1.7.64. Stuttgart (Ger). 34 caps.

Tall and capable in the air, Wohlfahrt is a fitness fanatic who made his name with FK Austria before moving to Stuttgart. Won German Cup in his first season with the club and has helped them into the quarter-finals of this season's Cup-winners Cup.

DEFENDERS

Wolfgang FEIERSINGER

30.1.65. Borussia Dortmund (Ger). 35 caps.

A central defender who was present for all but two of the World Cup qualifiers. Likely to line up with Peter Schottel and Anton Pfeffer in France if Prohaska opts for a back three.

Goran KARTALIJA

17.10.66. Lask Linz. 4 caps.

Reliable defender who was a latecomer to international football, making his debut just after his 30th birthday.

Walter KOGLER

12.12.67. SV Salzburg. 20 caps (1 gl).

Performed admirably in central defence in the World Cup qualifiers away in Estonia and Belarus. A useful option for Prohaska in the absence of any of his regular back three lineup.

Anton PFEFFER

17.8.65. FK Austria. 51 caps (1 gl).

Usually plays on the left of central defence and is very reliable having missed just eight League games and one international in the past two and a half seasons.

Peter SCHOTTEL

26.3.67. Rapid Vienna. 49 caps.

A national team regular who can play in any of the back line positions. A hard and industrious player, he missed only two of the World Cup qualifiers. Played in midfield when helping Rapid Vienna to the 1996 Cup-winners Cup Final.

MIDFIELDERS

Franz AIGNER

14.9.67. SV Salzburg. 6 caps (1 gl).

Joined Salzburg in 1992 and helped them to an unexpected Final appearance in the 1994 UEFA Cup. Has not been a regular in the national team and may have to be content with a squad place in France.

Harald CERNY

13.9.73. 1860 Munich (Ger). 19 caps.

Versatile player who seems to have established himself in the national team. One of 1860's best performers in the first half of this Bundesliga season.

Michael HATZ

17.11.70. Reggiana (Ita). 2 caps.

Moved to Reggiana from Rapid but suffered relegation to Serie B at the end of last season. This is not helping his international prospects though Prohaska will be able to call on him as a reliable marker should any of his regular starters be missing.

Andreas HERAF

10.9.67. Rapid Vienna. 9 caps (1 gl).

Has recently lost his place in the national team after playing every game last season. Usually plays on the left for Rapid, with whom he reached the Cup-winners Cup Final in 1996.

Andreas HERZOG

10.9.68. Werder Bremen (Ger). 64 caps (13 gls).

What Prohaska will do if anything befalls his one real star and playmaker is better not considered. His spells with Bayern Munich and now Werder Bremen have seen him play more than 150 games and score almost 50 goals in the Bundesliga. He is a great creator, but is not always the toughest of fighters.

Adolf HUTTER

11.2.70. SV Salzburg. 13 caps (3 gls).

Out of the national reckoning during the 1995-96 season but was recalled last term, appearing three times. He is still pulling his weight for Salzburg and should just make the cut for France.

Dietmar KUHBAUER

4.4.71. Real Sociedad (Spa). 23 caps (3 gls).

Renowned as a joker when at Rapid but suffered tragedy last February after his pregnant wife was involved in a car accident, suffering injuries from which she later died. Had previously been voted Austrian Footballer of the Year but, understandably, his form dipped following the accident. Moved to Real Sociedad in September in search of pastures new but has not been a regular with the national side in recent months.

Roman MAHLICH

17.9.71. Sturm Graz. 6 caps.

An ever-present in the national side this season. His good form has helped put his club side Sturm Graz in line for the League championship.

Stefan MARASEK

4.1.70. Freiburg (Ger). 11 caps (1 gl).

Playing in the German Second Division has not helped his international career and his last game was against Scotland at the start of the 96-97 season. Was with Rapid for the 1996 Cup-winners Cup campaign and missed only three League games for them last term.

Heimo PFEIFENBERGER

29.12.66. Werder Bremen (Ger). 34 caps (9 gls).

An ever-present in the national side this season and most of last. A vital cog in Prohaska's midfield, from where he has averaged around a goal every three games. A certain starter for the World Cup who has greatly benefited from playing in Germany with Werder Bremen since his move in 1996 from Salzburg.

Gilbert PRILASNIG

1.4.73. Sturm Graz. 4 caps.

One of the stars of the season, who has played a big part in Sturm Graz's rise to the top of the Austrian League. Played on the left side of midfield on his international debut against Sweden at the start of the season. Held his place in the four subsequent qualifiers and is certain to be in France. A sure target also for foreign scouts.

Dieter RAMUSCH

31.10.69. Grazer AK. 10 caps (1 gl).

Ten goals in 34 games for Grazer last season kept him in Prohaska's sights, but competition is fierce for a place in the starting lineup and this autumn he had to be content with being one of three subs brought on against Belarus.

Markus SCHOPP

22.2.74. Hamburg (Ger). 14 caps (1 gl).

Appeared briefly in the qualifying tie away to Estonia and in the game against Belarus which clinched Austria's place in France. Made his international debut in a Euro 96 qualifying game against Latvia and appeared 27 times for Hamburg last season, scoring three goals.

Peter STOGER

11.4.66. Rapid Vienna. 56 caps (13 gls).

Long a pillar of the Rapid and national team midfield, he has recently been only a sub for Austria, starting on the bench for six of the last eight internationals. Two goals against Belarus may convince Prohaska that he deserves his place back.

Ivica VASTIC

29.9.69. Sturm Graz. 8 caps (1 gl).

A Croat who was immediately selected for Austria after opting for Austrian nationality two years ago. An attacking midfielder, he has yet to finish on the losing side as an international.

Arnold WETL

2.2.70. FC Porto (Por). 12 caps (3 gls).

An attacking midfielder whom some would class as a striker. All five qualifying appearances came in the 96-97 season. First played for Austria in 1991.

FORWARDS

Thomas FLOGEL

7.6.61. Hearts (Sco). 9 caps.

Made a surprise move to Hearts last July after a career spent with Rapid. Could be a surprise choice for the finals.

Andreas OGRIS

7.10.64. FK Austria. 63 caps (10 gls).

No veteran could be more enthusiastic! Ogris is still swift and it is his fitness and spring form that will determine whether Prohaska calls up his old partner for France.

Anton (Toni) POLSTER

10.3.64. Koln (Ger). 87 caps (41 gls).

His seven goals in the qualification campaign confirm what he has meant to the national team for over a decade. Could become the first Austrian to gain 100 caps and has only the legendary Hanappi to overtake. France looks likely to be Toni's last throw of the dice at the top level.

Herfried SABITZER

19.10.69. Grazer AK. 6 caps (1 gl).

Played as a sub in the first World Cup qualifying match but has not appeared since and at 28 is relatively inexperienced at international level. Even so, good club form has kept him in Prohaska's sights.

Keeps them coming...Toni Polster is still scoring after all these years

Belgium

Oldies but potential goodies

Nicholas Harling assesses Belgium's chances as they prepare to face Holland – again

BELGIUM'S path to the World Cup finals was hardly irresistible or indeed a passage of great beauty, but who, ultimately, was complaining? The Red Devils had achieved their target and what is more, they had accomplished that ambition for the fifth successive time.

Not many countries can boast that, least of all Holland, their neighbours and fiercest rivals, who for the second finals running now cross the Belgians' path at the group stage. Also in Belgium's Group F in France are Mexico and South Korea, with whom they are much less acquainted.

When Belgium last met Holland in the finals, in the burning midday heat of the Citrus Bowl in Orlando, a 65th minute goal from Philippe Albert sufficed to give Belgium victory. Not that it ultimately helped them a great deal. The team, under Paul Van Himst, proceeded to lose their next match in Group F to Saudi Arabia in Washington. Then, as a third-place qualifier, Belgium had the misfortune to be paired against Germany in Chicago, where after a mere two-day break, they lost controversially, 3-2.

This time around, the two nations meet in their opening tie in Group E at Saint Etienne on June 13, since the fates have once again uncannily conspired to pit them together. Why, both teams must wonder, are they invariably required to play each other? No two teams had come through the same qualifying group, as Belgium and Holland did in Group 7, only then to be paired together once more at the first stage of the finals.

Belgium will certainly concede the psychological advantage to the Dutch, for they were convincingly beaten in both the qualifying ties, never more so than in the King Baudoin stadium in Brussels. Holland's 3-0 win in December 1996 proved the last match in the short reign of Wilfried Van Moer. It was his only defeat in five matches, but Van Moer's inability to explain adequately to the Belgian Federation the reasons for the humiliation cost him his job.

Georges Leekens was the man entrusted with the task of securing Belgium's qualification, much to the annoyance of Excelsior Mouscron, who had risen from obscurity to the top of the League under Leekens. The new coach's start was hardly impressive. Belgium lost a friendly game with Northern Ireland, 3-0, but the charismatic Leekens, the country's 19th national coach, proved himself a shrewd operator during that defeat in Belfast.

Leekens had wanted another midfield grafter alongside Lorenzo Staelens, but his choice was a surprise. Or was it? Maybe it was out of sentiment that Leekens should return to Club Brugge, for whom he had been a reliable central defender in the 1970s. Yet Franky Van der Elst must have been the last person expecting a recall.

Van der Elst had not appeared for the national team for over two years. A recall was perhaps the last thing he needed after suffering personal humiliation from the Anderlecht crowd when he came off during the 4-1 European Championship qualifying defeat by Spain. He announced then that his international career was over.

Leekens clearly thought differently. The coach restored Van der Elst, who was a few weeks away from his 36th birthday, and kept him in the side for every subsequent qualifying match. "After that match in Belfast I wondered what I was still doing in the national team ," admitted Van der Elst. "When Leekens first contacted me I hesitated, but now I know that it is fun to be playing in this team. The spirit is back, the tempo is quicker. It's a good team."

How good, and how old, only time will tell. An ageing squad, who have to play their last two group games in what may well be the stifling heat of the afternoon, could find the going tough in France. It will certainly be tougher than when they twice overcame Wales and routed San Marino twice in the qualifying group.

Belgium's hardened veterans did not exactly establish themselves as world-beaters with those victories, but it was in the second win over Turkey, 3-1 in front of a hostile crowd in Istanbul, that Leekens discovered that his team possessed the necessary mettle.

There was also confirmation that Luis Oliveira, Brazilian by birth but now thankfully a naturalised Belgian, was a forward of much potential and considerable pace. With a first-half hat-trick, Luis Oliveira turned a tricky tie into something of a stroll. With six goals, he finished the qualifying programme as Belgium's top scorer.

However, Belgium need not rely on Luis Oliveira alone up front, certainly not when everyone is fit and free from suspension (which is especially pertinent in the case of the temperamental Gilles De Bilde). Leekens is almost spoilt for choice in attack. There is Luc Nilis, who like De Bilde plays in Holland for PSV, and Marc Wilmots, whose goals won the UEFA Cup for Schalke last year. And when all else fails, Leekens can always call upon the Mpenza brothers, nurtured by the coach at Mouscron.

The recall of Enzo Scifo has also helped. Anderlecht's elegant midfielder had sat on the bench for 89 frustrating minutes against Wales in Cardiff, but a month later he confounded those who had written off his international prospects by returning to dominate the Turks. Since such a large part of his career has been spent in France, Scifo would obviously like nothing better than to return there on the greatest international stage in June.

The odds are that Leekens will further Scifo's cause. "My first job when I took over was to create a new positive mentality with the squad," the coach explained. "There seemed to be little motivation. The atmosphere was depressing. I'm glad to say that is no longer the case. We've rediscovered our hunger for success and when we get together, the spirit is like that of a club side.

"I'm not here to teach my players how to play football. My job isn't to drill them into perfect physical specimens. What I want to do is encourage them to enjoy playing together and to make sure they stick to my philosophy."

The team ethic certainly played its part. Finishing second to Holland in Group 7 meant the Belgians had to overcome the Republic of Ireland in a play-off in order to qualify. In the two matches, the Belgian defence surpassed themselves. Resisting everything the Irish could hurl at them, they ensured Belgium's qualification. Brussels went mad.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 1st round; 1934 1st round;
1938 1st round; **1950** Did not enter;
1954 1st round; **1958** Did not qualify;
1962 Did not qualify; **1966** Did not qualify;
1970 1st round; **1974** Did not qualify;
1978 Did not qualify; **1982** 2nd round;
1986 Semi-finalist/4th place; **1990** 2nd round
1994 2nd round
Total Played 29 Won 9 Drawn 4 Lost 16 Goals for 37 Goals against 53

How they qualified

EUROPEAN SECTION GROUP 7

31.08.96.....Belgium-Turkey 2-1
09.10.96.....San Marino-Belgium 0-3
14.12.96.....Belgium-Holland 0-3
29.03.97.....Wales-Belgium 1-2
30.04.97.....Turkey-Belgium 1-3
07.06.97.....Belgium-San Marino.....6-0
06.09.97.....Holland-Belgium.....3-1
11.10.07.....Belgium-Wales 3-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	8	6	1	1	26	4	19
***Belgium**	8	6	0	2	20	11	18
Turkey	8	4	2	2	21	9	14
Wales	8	2	1	5	20	21	7
San Marino	8	0	0	8	0	42	0

**Entered play-offs*

PLAY-OFFS

29.10.97 .....Rep. Ireland-Belgium.....1-1
15.11.97 .....Belgium-Rep.Ireland.....2-1
Belgium won 3-2 on agg

Players used in qualifiers

Ten appearances De Wilde.
Nine Luis Oliveira, Van Kerkhoven.
Seven Crasson, Staelens, Van der Elst.
Six Nilis.
Four De Bilde, De Roover, L Mpenza, Scifo, Smidts, Verheyen, Vidovic, Wilmots.
Three Boffin, Deflandre, Degryse, Lemoine, Leonard, Renier, Schepens, Verstraeten.
Two Albert, Borkelmans, Claessens, Claeys, Genaux, Goosens, Medved, Pierre, Van Meir.
One De Boeck, Doll, Haagdoren, Jbari, M Mpenza, Peiremans.

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Six Luis Oliveira. **Five** Staelens. **Four** Nilis. **Two** L Mpenza; **One** Claessens, Crasson, Degryse, Van Meir, Verheyen, Wilmots.

New boss...Georges Leekens

The Coach

Georges LEEKENS
Took over as national coach last year after Wilfried Van Moer was sacked. A defender with Club Brugge, Leekens, aged 49, coached Kortrijk, Anderlecht, Cercle Bruges, Club Brugge, Mechelen, Trabzonspor and Charleroi. He then led Mouscron from the Belgian second division to the top of the first division before leaving to coach the national team.

Goalkeepers

Philip DE WILDE
Date of birth: 5.7.64. Club: Sporting Lisbon (Por). 18 caps.
The only player who played in every minute of Belgium's qualifying campaign – a worthy reward after a decade as understudy to the great Michel Preud'homme and Gilbert Bodart. Reliable shot-stopper who transferred to Portugal last summer from Anderlecht.

Philippe VAN DE WALLE
22.12.61. Lierse. 2 caps.
Has not played since his two caps at the end of the 1995-96 season. Won 1997 Belgian Cup with Ekeren before moving to Lierse where his stay has not been a happy one.

Defenders

Bertrand CRASSON
5.10.71. Napoli (Ita). 12 caps (1 gl).
Like another talented full-back, Georges Grun, Crasson has furthered his career in Italy. Napoli's poor defence has given him plenty of scope to show what he can do, but he has had little chance to indulge his forte, overlapping.

Eric DEFLANDRE
2.8.73. Club Brugge. 2 caps.
Missed the first leg of the play-off against the Republic of Ireland, but experienced the joy – and pain – of qualification in the second. He was stamped on by David Connolly in the incident that led to Irishman's dismissal. Formerly with Ekeren.

Bart DE ROOVER
21.8.67. NAC Breda (Hol). 4 caps.
A relative latecomer to the international scene. Four appearances in the qualifying campaign but did not, perhaps significantly, feature in the play-offs. Won Belgian title with Lierse before moving to Holland.

Philippe LEONARD
12.2.74. Monaco (Fra). 8 caps.

Pascal RENIER
3.8.71. Club Brugge. 13 caps.

Rudi SMIDTS
12.8.63. Charleroi. 33 caps (1 gl).
Played more than 400 games in central defence for home-town club Antwerp before moving to Charleroi last year. Another relative latecomer to the national team.

Eric VAN MEIR
28.2.68. Lierse. 10 caps (1 gl).
Tall libero who should have made a more of an impact on the national side over the years. Tower of strength at the back for champions Lierse last season. Likes to get forward and has a powerful shot.

Mike VERSTRAETEN
12.8.67. Ekeren. 3 caps.
Proved in the play-offs that he has the temperament for the big occasion despite his tender age. A Belgian cup-winner last season.

Gordan VIDOVIC
23.6.68. Mouscron. 4 caps.
Left-back who made his debut last season against San Marino after starring in Mouscron's surprise title challenge under Leekens.

Midfielders

Danny BOFFIN
10.7.65. Metz (Fra). 31 caps.
Returned to the national side after going more than a year without a cap. A regular at the start of the 1990s and veteran of USA 94. Currently starring for high-flying Metz after spells with St Truiden, Standard Liege and Anderlecht.

Vital BORKELMANS
1.6.63. Club Brugge. 15 caps.
Another veteran who thought his international career was over before his recall as substitute against Wales. Indeed, most caps for this ball-winning midfielder have been as sub.

Marc DEGRYSE
4.9.65. PSV Eindhoven (Hol). 63 caps (23 gls).
The emphasis is on elegance with this goalscoring midfielder who was Belgian Player of the Year while at Anderlecht, for whom he scored 50 goals over four seasons following a record £1.5million move from Club Brugge. Failed to impress in spell with Sheffield Wednesday in England. Currently lost his place in the senior side, but must be considered for the World Cup squad.

Vincenzo (Enzo) SCIFO
19.2.66. Anderlecht. 79 caps (17 gls).
Perhaps the most celebrated member of the squad and heading for his fourth World Cup finals. Born to Italian parents in Belgium, Scifo has adorned the midfield of Italian sides Inter and Torino, but it has mainly been in France that his game, like the local wines, have matured. Groin injury kept him out of the play-offs.

Lorenzo STAELENS
30.4.64. Club Brugge. 44 caps (6 gls).
Runs himself into the ground for club and country and has been given a more central role by Leekens with licence to attack. The new coach's foresight was repaid by five goals in seven qualifying games from a player who had previously only scored once in 36 appearances. Made his international debut in May 1990 and is currently en route to his fourth League title with Club Brugge.

Franky VAN DER ELST
30.4.61. Club Brugge. 77 caps.
Still going strong at an age when only goalkeepers regularly feature on the international stage, but owes much to Leekens. An unsung hero who wins the ball for the likes of Scifo. Belgium's current Footballer of the Year is aiming for a fourth World Cup finals. Captain of Brugge, he started with RWD Molenbeek.

Nico VAN KERCKHOVEN
14.12.70. Lierse. 11 caps.
Left-sided midfielder who joins the attack to often devastating attack. A one-club man who began with part-time local club Lint before joining Lierse. One of the few players to stay after last season's title triumph.

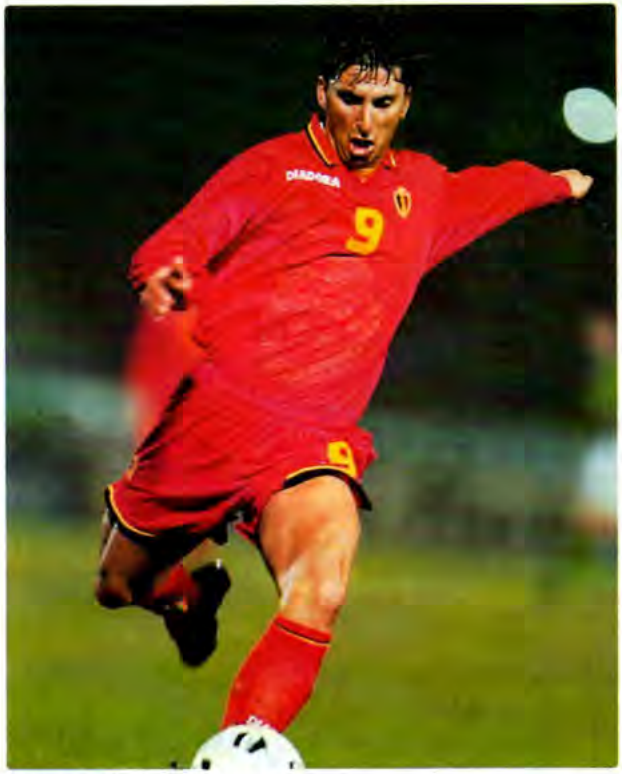
Gert VERHEYEN
20.9.70. Club Brugge. 11 caps (2 gls)

Forwards

Gert CLAESSENS
21.2.72. Club Brugge. 2 caps (1 gl).
Scored on his Belgium debut against Wales and put Nilis through for the crucial goal against the Republic of Ireland. His 10 goals before Christmas have probably made the title run-in a formality for Brugge.

Gilles DE BILDE
9.6.71. PSV Eindhoven (Hol). 14 caps (1 gl).
A temperamental character who can not blame just the consistency of his rivals for his failure to make more of an impact on the international stage. Indiscipline has led to suspensions, most notably when he was banned from playing for Anderlecht after assaulting Aalst's Krist Porte a year ago. PSV found a loophole in the laws, and took him to Holland, where he has established a useful partnership with Nilis which may yet serve Belgium well.

Airton LUIS OLIVEIRA Barroso
24.3.69. Fiorentina (Ita). 22 caps (7 gls).
Extremely fast Brazilian-born striker who took to Belgium so much after signing for Anderlecht from a Brazilian junior club in 1985 aged 16 that he changed his nationality.



Danger man...PSV's Luc Nilis

Scored on his international debut against Tunisia in 1992 and joined Cagliari shortly afterwards. Signed for Fiorentina in 1996.

Luc NILIS
25.5.67. PSV Eindhoven (Hol). 42 caps (8 gls).
The player most responsible for taking Belgium to the finals in France. An exceptionally talented front runner who scored twice against the Republic of Ireland in the play-offs. Surprisingly his international career took a long time to take off – he contributed more than 100 goals in six for Anderlecht, but his first for Belgium, against Zambia, took four years in coming. But now that he has discovered the knack, Belgium could reap the benefits. A Dutch League title-winner with PSV last season and in exciting form in the Champions League last autumn.

Lokonda MPENZA
4.7.78. Standard Liege. 5 caps (2 gls).
Younger of the two brothers but considered more gifted. Born in Belgium of Zairean parents, the Mpenzas played together at Mouscron, where they flourished under the coaching of Leekens. When the coach left for the national side, they both went to Standard.

Mbo MPENZA
4.12.76. Standard Liege. 1 cap.
Older of the two dreadlocked brothers who is yet to make any real impact on the national side.

Marc WILMOTS
22.2.69. Schalke (Ger). 28 caps (9 gls).
Prefers to play behind the front two where he can best exploit his powerful running and shooting. Skill has never been one of his virtues, but his clubs – Mechelen, Standard Liege and now Schalke – have never complained.

Brazil

Too good for their own good

Brian Homewood warns the holders and record four-time winners against complacency

BRAZIL coach Mario Zagallo was adamant after toying with the idea of a three-man strike-force i n the recent 2-1 friendly win over South Africa. "Three forwards is not a viable option for a starting line-up," he said. "It leaves the midfield undermanned and overworked."

Zagallo seemed almost pleased that South Africa had overrun his side in midfield after he had started with three recognised strikers – Bebeto, Romario and the Portuguesa revelation, Rodrigo. He has always been a staunch 4-4-2 man and there was a clear air of 'I told you so' as he gave his verdict after reluctantly moving into new tactical ground.

This means, of course, that any dreams of Brazil starting games with a Ronaldo-Romario-Bebeto or Ronaldo-Romario-Edmundo frontline have finally been laid to rest. As Zagallo said when he announced the squad for the Confederations Cup in Saudi Arabia: "The attack will be Ronaldo plus one other."

The favourite to be the one other is still Romario. A great goal against South Africa, followed by two more against Saudi Arabia in the Confederations Cup, proved that he has not lost his edge, despite being left out in the cold at Valencia. The argument against Romario is, as we all know, his attitude.

Zagallo has still not forgiven Romario for an incident at the Copa America in Bolivia last summer, when he limped out of the semi-final against Peru with a pulled muscle and then, ignoring doctors' orders, spent the night painting Santa Cruz de la Sierra red. His subsequent declaration that he plays better after a night on the town will not have helped his cause.

Bebeto, hugely admired by Zagallo, appears to be second choice and needs to find himself a club if he is stay in the running. Since leaving Deportivo La Coruna in mid-1996, Bebeto has played for Flamengo (three months), Sevilla (eight matches) and Vitoria (eight months), seen a move back to Deportivo fall through, returned to Vitoria for one match and played on loan for Cruzeiro in the World Club Cup Final.

The rest of Brazil's wealth of world-class forwards will have to contend with the odd appearance as substitute, if they are lucky to get in the squad at all. Players such as Sonny Anderson (Barcelona) and Giovane Elber (Bayern Munich) are not even on the shortlist for France.

The back-up for Ronaldo and co is likely to be Dodo, who has made the national team after a remarkable year in which he started as an unknown reserve at his club, Sao Paulo.

Brazil even have one player who on current form can claim to be better than Ronaldo. Edmundo has unceremoniously booted the Inter player out of the limelight with his goalscoring exploits – a record-breaking 29 goals for Vasco da Gama in this year's Brazilian championship, including six in a single game against Uniao Sao Joao and a hat-trick against Flamengo, the second in just over a year against Vasco's bitterest rivals, which was simply out of this world.

As with Romario, Edmundo's temperament is a problem, and threatens to keep him out of the squad. We could fill an entire magazine with Edmundo's indiscretions, suffice to say that he was sent off seven times last year alone. On his last appearance for Brazil, in the Copa America final against Bolivia, he elbowed an opponent in the face. The referee missed the incident, but wily old Zagallo did not. He substituted Edmundo immediately and has not picked him since.

Listening to Zagallo, it is often hard to believe that he is in charge of such a talented group of players. Talk during the Copa America was of "playing when we haven't got the ball" and the old phrase "I'd rather play ugly football and win than play pretty football and lose" was repeated after almost every game. One of his favourite terms is "compact". The words artistry and flair rarely form part of Zagallo's vocabulary.

Under Zagallo, Brazil can be expected to defend in depth when the opposition have the ball and counter-attack. If the world expects them to put on the sort of show it witnessed in 1970 and 1982, then the world may be disappointed. There will certainly be moments of magic from the forwards but from the midfield backwards, efficiency is Zagallo's watchword.

Results-wise, it is hard to argue with Zagallo's philosophy. The 1-0 win over England in the Tournoi de France began a run of 14 straight wins which ended, amazingly, with the 0-0 draw with Australia in the Confederations Cup.

Brazil have made up for their absence from the World Cup qualifiers by playing a whole series of friendlies. Some have been of dubious value – home matches to below-strength and jet-lagged Wales and Ecuador stand out as examples of how to waste everybody's time – but the CBF has irritated foreign European clubs by insisting on bringing over top players nevertheless.

The old story about Brazil being their own worst enemies will ring true as ever in France. With enough world-class players to form at least three top-level national teams, Brazil will start as favourites to defend their title, but old sins such as underestimating the opposition, internal wrangling and negotiating transfers while on national-team duty are still being committed.

Zagallo, despite his experience, is notorious for not doing his homework on the opposition, a flaw which was cruelly exposed during last May's 4-2 defeat by Norway. Zagallo blamed the defeat on jet-lag and lack of training, but the Norwegian style of play surprised nobody apart from Brazil's defence, who were caught offguard and were two goals down after 20 minutes.

Brazilian reaction to their first-round draw (Norway again, Scotland and Morocco) brought a new meaning to the word over-confidence. The general sentiment was that Brazil only have to turn up to finish top of their group in France.

In-fighting is another Brazilian malaise which appears incurable if events at the Confederations Cup are anything to go by.

Brazil's stay in Saudi Arabia was soured by bad feeling over, of all things, haircuts. This followed a night of terror in the team hotel when a group of players, Junior Baiano, Ze Roberto and Flavio Conceicao, burst into the rooms of other players and began shaving heads with a razor belonging to the increasingly bald Romario. Several victims, including Goncalves, Bebeto and Leonardo, found the incident as amusing as one of Globo television's appalling comedy programmes.

The CBF will have its work cut out to stave off the inevitable hoard of agents who habitually surround the Brazil team hotel at major tournaments, hoping to secure transfer deals for the players. Zagallo was clearly exasperated during last year's trip to Europe at the attention focused on the Ronaldo transfer saga.

France will be no different.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 1st round
1934 1st round
1938 Semi-finalists/3rd place
1954 Quarter-finalists
1958 Winners
1962 Winners
1966 1st round
1970 Winners
1974 2nd round/4th place
1978 2nd round/3rd place
1982 2nd round
1986 Quarter-finalists
1990 2nd round
1994 Winners
Total Played 73 Won 49 Drawn 13 Lost 11
Goals for 159 Goals against 68

How they qualified

Automatically, as holders.

Four-times winner...Mario Zagallo

The Coach

Mario ZAGALLO
The grandfather of Brazilian coaches who was a member of the Brazil side who won the World Cup in 1958 and 1962 and was coach when Brazil won in Mexico in 1970. As a left-winger with America, Flamengo and Botafago, Zagallo's workrate earned him the nickname 'Formiguinha' (little ant. Returned to the national side coaching set-up in 1994 as assistant to Carlos Alberto Parreira, making Zagallo the only man to have been involved in four World Cup victories.

Goalkeepeers

CARLOS GERMANO
Date of birth: 14.8.70. Club: Vasco da Gama. 8 caps.
Number two to Taffarel. A one-club man who has performed consistently well for Vasco for the last four years.

Claudio TAFFAREL
8.5.66. Atletico Mineiro. 86 Caps.
The hero in 1994, Taffarel looks set to play in his third World Cup finals even though his recent form has at times been shaky. There are probably around a dozen goalkeepers in Brazil of the same standard, but Taffarel has the trust of Zagallo because of his international experience. Said in 1995 that he would never play for Brazil again after being criticised by CBF president Ricardo Teixeira, but changed his mind last year.

ROGERIO
22.1.73. Sao Paulo. Uncapped.
Became Sao Paulo's first-choice keeper last year after years as Zetti's understudy. Takes free-kicks for his club, scoring three goals, but is unlikely to get the chance to do the same for the national team.

Defenders

ALDAIR Nascimento Santos
30.11.65. Roma (Ita). 54 caps (3 gls).
Central defender who is aiming for a hat-trick of World Cup finals, though his performances for Brazil have not been entirely convincing.

ANDRE Alves CRUZ
20.9.68. Milan (Ita). 29 caps (1 gl).
Central defender with a powerful left-foot shot. Joined Milan last summer from Napoli.

CAFU, Marcos Evangelista de Moraes
19.6.70. Roma (Ita). 58 caps (1 gl).
Has now taken over from Jorginho as Zagallo's first-choice right-back.

Marcelo GONCALVES Costa Lopes
22.2.66. Botafogo. 15 caps (1 gl).
A key man for Botafogo since joining them in 1995 after five years in Mexico with Universidad de Guadalajara. Won the Brazilian championship in 1995 and the Carioca (Rio) championship last year. Centre-back and a natural leader on the field.

JUNIOR BAIANO, Raimundo Ferreira Ramos Junior
14.3.70. Flamengo. 5 caps (2 gls).
Centre-back and one-time bad boy who appears to have become a reformed character in the last year. Has returned to Flamengo, where he begun his career, via Sao Paulo and Germany's Werder Bremen, who sacked him after he received a 10-match Bundesliga ban for elbowing an opponent, one of many misdemeanors in the early days of his career. Likes to get forward and score goals.

ROBERTO CARLOS da Silva
10.4.73. Real Madrid (Spa). 39 caps (2 gls).
First-choice left-back and best-known for his amazing free-kicks, though he could suffer if FIFA clamps down on sliding tackles, which are another of his trademarks. Also criticised for getting carried away with his forays upfield and abandoning his defensive duties in the process.

ZE MARIA, Jose Marcelo Ferreira
25.7.73. Parma (Ita). 6 caps (1 gl).
Reserve right-back.

ZE ROBERTO, Jose Roberto da Silva Junior
6.7.74. Real Madrid (Spa). 15 caps (1 gl).
Reserve left-back who can also play in midfield. Raised with Portuguesa in Sao Paulo before moving to Spain.

Midfielders

DENILSON de Oliveira
24.8.77. Sao Paulo. 14 caps (5 gls).
The nearest thing in the squad to an old-fashioned winger and yet another left-footed player. His explosive pace has made him an instant success with Zagallo, himself a left-winger back in the 1950s and 1960s. Has thrived in the national team since establishing himself as a first-choice player with his performances in the Tournoi de France and Copa America. Will join Spain's Real Betis after the World Cup finals in a move which will make him the world's most expensive player.

DJALMINHA, Djalma Feitosa Dias
9.12.70. Deportivo La Coruna (Spa). 10 caps (4 gls).
The man of the moment last year, but has slipped out of the limelight since moving from Palmeiras to Spain and his national team performances have been disappointing. A hot temper does not help. Left-footed, he possesses sublime skills and is the son of former international Djalma Dias.

DORIVA Guidoni Junior
28.5.72. Atletico Mineiro. 8 caps.
A 'piano carrier' – the term Brazilians use for players who do the donkey work in midfield. Has been in and out of the team during the last three years and has never played in a major tournament, but Zagallo admires his tactical discipline.

FLAVIO da CONCEICAO
12.6.74. Deportivo La Coruna (Spa). 12 caps (1 gl).
Basically used by Zagallo as a midfield destroyer, but his distribution is good, he has a powerful, accurate shot and a good goalscoring record, giving him the edge over 1994 ever-present Mauro Silva.

JUNINHO, Osvaldo Giroldo Junior
22.2.73. Atletico Madrid (Spa). 20 caps (2 gls).
Currently behind Leonardo and Denilson in the queue for a place as one of Zagallo's attacking midfielders, though the fact that he is right-footed (the former are both left-footed) could count in his favour. Sources claim he does always follow Zagallo's instructions too closely and would fare better under a coach who gave him more freedom.

LEONARDO de Araujo
5.9.69. Milan (Ita). 39 caps (6 gls).
Left-back in the last World Cup, until he was sent off for elbowing Tab Ramos in the face in a totally out-of-character incident, but is the team's main playmaker this time around. Also the team thinker, he stunned Brazilian journalists during the Copa America by giving them a 10-minute lecture on the role of the sports media.

RIVALDO Vito Borba Ferreira
19.4.72. Barcelona (Spa). 10 caps (5 gls).
Left-footed free-kick specialist who has redeemed himself with recent performances after being made the scapegoat for Brazil's failure to win the Olympic gold medal in 1996.

Forwards

EDMUNDO Alves de Souza Neto
2.4.91. Vasco da Gama. 14 caps (8 gls.
Broke the Brazilian championship goalscoring record with 29 goals in last year's competition. At least as good as Ronaldo on his day but Zagallo has refused to pick him since the Copa America for disciplinary reasons. Sent off five times in 1993 and on seven occasions last year, when he also made racist comments after a game. For all this, a pardon is expected in time for France, provided he keeps his nose reasonably clean.

World-beater...Ronaldo

ROMARIO de Souza Faria
29.1.66. Valencia (Spa). 51 caps (41 gls).
Claims to be in better shape than ever despite his age, although problems at his club could hinder his attempt to make the team.

BEBETO, Jose Roberto Gama de Oliveira
16.2.64. Vitoria Bahia. 62 caps (38 gls).
His performance against South Africa showed that he has not lost his touch despite his inability to find a club to settle at. However, during the Confederations Cup he complained that he found the constant battle with Romario for a place "stressful".

DODO, Ricardo Lucas
2.5.74. Sao Paulo. 5 caps (2 gls).
An opportunist goalscorer who began last year as a reserve at Sao Paulo but finished the Paulista (regional) championship as top scorer.

Osmar DONIZETE Candido
24.10.68. Corinthians. 8 caps.
Nicknamed 'The Black Panther' and a favourite of Zagallo's. However, his performances in the latter half of last year were fairly lame. Needs to regain his club form quickly if he is to make the World Cup.

RONALDO Luis Nazario da Lima
22.9.76. Internazionale. 29 caps.
The world's best and most hyped player, although constant travelling and fixture congestion, in addition to his commercial engagements, could wear him out by June. He benefits from an apparent rule which states: 'A penalty shall be awarded every time Ronaldo falls over in the penalty area.' The spot-kick he won against South Korea recently was quite scandalous. Referees be warned.

THE DRAW

GROUP A

June 10	Brazil v Scotland	Saint-Denis	4.30pm
June 10	Morocco v Norway	Montpellier	8pm
June 16	Scotland v Norway	Bordeaux	4.30pm
June 16	Brazil v Morocco	Nantes	8pm
June 23	Brazil v Norway	Marseille	8pm
June 23	Scotland v Morocco	Saint-Etienne	8pm

GROUP B

June 11	Italy v Chile	Bordeaux	4.30pm
June 11	Cameroon v Austria	Toulouse	8pm
June 17	Chile v Austria	Saint-Etienne	4.30pm
June 17	Italy v Cameroon	Montpellier	8pm
June 23	Italy v Austria	Saint-Denis	3pm
June 23	Chile v Cameroon	Nantes	3pm

GROUP C

June 12	Saudi Arabia v Denmark	Lens	4.30pm
June 12	France v South Africa	Marseille	8pm
June 18	South Africa v Denmark	Toulouse	4.30pm
June 18	France v Saudi Arabia	Saint-Denis	8pm
June 24	France v Denmark	Lyon	3pm
June 24	S Africa v Saudi Arabia	Bordeaux	3pm

GROUP D

June 12	Paraguay v Bulgaria	Montpellier	1.30pm
June 13	Spain v Nigeria	Nantes	1.30pm
June 19	Spain v Paraguay	Saint-Etienne	8pm
June 19	Nigeria v Bulgaria	Paris	4.30pm
June 24	Spain v Bulgaria	Lens	8pm
June 24	Nigeria v Paraguay	Toulouse	8pm

GROUP E

June 13	South Korea v Mexico	Lyon	4.30pm
June 13	Holland v Belgium	Saint-Denis	8pm
June 20	Belgium v Mexico	Bordeaux	4.30pm
June 20	Holland v South Korea	Marseille	8pm
June 25	Holland v Mexico	Saint-Etienne	3pm
June 25	Belgium v South Korea	Paris	3pm

GROUP F

June 14	Yugoslavia v Iran	Saint-Etienne	4.30pm
June 15	Germany v USA	Paris	8pm
June 21	Germany v Yugoslavia	Lens	1.30pm
June 21	USA v Iran	Lyon	8pm
June 25	Germany v Iran	Montpellier	8pm
June 25	USA v Yugoslavia	Nantes	8pm

GROUP G

June 15	England v Tunisia	Marseille	1.30pm
June 15	Romania v Colombia	Lyon	4.30pm
June 22	Colombia v Tunisia	Montpellier	4.30pm
June 22	Romania v England	Toulouse	8pm
June 26	Romania v Tunisia	Saint-Denis	8pm
June 26	Colombia v England	Lens	8pm

GROUP H

June 14	Argentina v Japan	Toulouse	1.30pm
June 14	Jamaica v Croatia	Lens	8pm
June 20	Japan v Croatia	Nantes	1.30pm
June 21	Argentina v Jamaica	Paris	2.30pm
June 26	Argentina v Croatia	Bordeaux	3pm
June 26	Japan v Jamaica	Lyon	3pm

SECOND ROUND

June 27	Game 2	Winner B v Runner-up A	Marseille	3.30pm
June 27	Game 1	Winner A v Runner-up B	Paris	8pm
June 28	Game 3	Winner C v Runner-up D	Lens	3.30pm
June 28	Game 4	Winner D v Runner-up C	Saint-Denis	8pm
June 29	Game 6	Winner F v Runner-up E	Montpellier	3.30pm
June 29	Game 5	Winner E v Runner-up F	Toulouse	8pm
June 30	Game 7	Winner G v Runner-up H	Bordeaux	3.30pm
June 30	Game 8	Winner H v Runner-up G	Saint-Etienne	8pm

QUARTER-FINALS

July 3	Game B	Winner 2 v Winner 3	Saint-Denis	3.30pm
July 3	Game A	Winner 1 v Winner 4	Nantes	8pm
July 4	Game C	Winner 5 v Winner 8	Marseille	3.30pm
July 4	Game D	Winner 6 v Winner 7	Lyon	8pm

SEMI-FINALS

July 7	Winner A v Winner C	Marseille	8pm
July 8	Winner B v Winner D	Saint-Denis	8pm

3RD PLACE PLAY-OFF

July 11	Semi-final losers	Paris	8pm

WORLD CUP FINAL

July 12	Saint-Denis	8pm

All kick-off times BST

Bulgaria

Over the hill (and far away)

The ageing Bulgars are unlikely to rewrite the history books this time, says Bob Vaughan

BULGARIA'S recent success in the international big time will be confirmed as uncharacteristic by anybody who takes the trouble to look back critically at the country's previous 13 entries into the World Cup.

Bulgaria first qualified for the World Cup finals in 1962 after years of amateur football and international isolation. Football took a back seat in the Soviet Bloc until Hungary's success at the 1952 Olympics.

Qualification for Chile was the first of four successive successes in preliminary competition. The downside was the failure to win a game in any of the final rounds between the early 1960s and the 1974 finals in West Germany.

There followed two non-qualifications (for the 1978 and 1982 finals) and clear evidence that the club sides were also not up to European or world standards. Few Bulgarians had ever played abroad, but the political changes of 1989 brought an end to socialist sport. There had been an eye opener in 1986, with Bulgaria winning and drawing against Yugoslavia and going to the finals in Mexico, where two draws and a defeats by the hosts showed how much there was still to do if Bulgaria were to become a force to be reckoned with.

There was disappointment again in 1990 with elimination by Romania and Denmark from qualifying Group 1. Things could only get better. Surely a time would come when Bulgaria would not only reach the finals but eventually win a match there.

The qualifying draw for the 1994 tournament was encouraging, with two teams going through and no Yugoslavs or British teams to face. Sweden and Bulgaria emerged after some close calls and ironically were to meet again in the USA.

The then coach Dimitar Penev had a generation of players, the like of which Bulgaria, or anyone else for that matter, may only have once in decades. The spirit was good, the players were experienced and draw favourable.

Amazingly, Penev's team lost to Nigeria but beat Argentina. All three went through to the second round, and the rest is history. Mexico were eliminated in a penalty shoot-out, and on a famous day in New York Lechkov's balding pate turned the ball into the German net for a winner no fan back in Sofia, nor indeed the few travelling supporters present, will ever forget.

Defeat in the semi-final by an Italian side inspired by Roberto Baggio, followed by disappointment against Sweden in the 3rd place play-off, could not disguise the great achievement.

Hristo Stoichkov still maintains that the team should have reached the Final, or at least come third, but nevertheless Bulgaria returned home in triumph.

As the famous German coach Sepp Herberger always maintained, the difficult part is staying on top and rooting out any seed of self-destruction. Penev's problem was now the high expectation for Euro 96 – that the team would qualify automatically, and perhaps go one better.

Such hope had not existed before USA 94. Penev also now had player power on almost Dutch lines to contend with, as well as difficult relations with a Federation quite unused to success.

The writing, however, should have been on the wall when Bulgaria lost to Georgia in the qualifiers. Penev was finding it difficult to replace members of the squad who were successful in America but who had become a little long in the tooth.

Nevertheless, the old guard travelled to northern England in June 1996 with many observers wondering whether the coach or his star player was in charge. And would Stoichkov and Lechkov have the legs?

The questions were answered when Bulgaria were bundled out at the group stage.

Penev was sacked, rather harshly given his record, and replaced by Hristo Bonev, who experienced a considerable baptism of fire before a ball had even been kicked. Stoichkov, angered at Penev's dismissal, organised a boycott of the France 98 qualifiers in a bid to get Penev reinstated. In the event only Stoichkov and Penev's nephew Luboslav expressed their solidarity with the former coach and Stoichkov remained in the cold for some months.

However, peace was always likely to break out at some time, and this was achieved by Bonev calling up the would-be rebels for mid-winter training. The France 98 qualifying campaign ended successfully without recourse to the play-offs.

Bonev is positive about his teams's chances in France, despite facing much the same problems as his predecessor – namely an ever ageing squad.

"Euro 96 was a disappointment. It was less than we anticipated. We were semi-finalists in America and we seriously feel we can obtain a medal in France," said Bonev. "We have had a generation of great players, who are still a force at international level. I know, however, what a long tournament this will be and we must have some youth in the squad. I have a number of players who are beginning to show what they can do."

Bonev is keen to introduce fresh legs to the squad. However, if the following is his best team, the average age will be one of the highest in France: Zdravkov (aged 27), Kishishev (23), Ivanov (32), Yordanov (32), Petkov (22), Lechkov (31), Yankov (32), Balakov (32), Stoichkov (32), Kostadinov (30), Penev (31).

There must be concern as to who will do the running. Kostadinov may be electric at times, Balakov still have bundles of energy, but who can compensate if Stoichkov goes to the tournament with little club football behind him? Can Lechkov change up to World Cup pace from the Turkish League? It looks as if Bonev could make Penev's mistake of too little change, too late.

There is still half a season to go, but few of the first 15 or 16 are playing at home and so available for training camps and friendlies. Bulgaria may have put Russia out of the competition, but will that wash in a difficult Group D, which features the Olympic champions Nigeria, an excellent Spanish side and a Paraguay team who will flood the midfield.

It would be irony indeed if Bulgaria went back to their old habits of being whitewashed. It would be a cruel throw of the dice in what is surely the last one for Bulgaria's greatest generation of players.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 Did not enter; **1934** Did not qualify; **1938** Did not qualify **1950** Did not enter; **1954** Did not qualify; **1958** Did not qualify; **1962** 1st round; **1966** 1st round; **1970** 1st round; **1974** 1st round; **1978** Did not qualify; **1982** Did not qualify; **1986** 1st round; **1990** 1st round; **1994** Semi-finalists/4th place.
Total Played 23 won 3 drawn 7 lost 13 Goals for 21 Goals against 46.

How they qualified

EUROPEAN SECTION GROUP 5

01.09.96.....Israel-Bulgaria.....2-1
08.10.96.....Luxembourg-Bulgaria.....1-2
14.12.96.....Cyprus-Bulgaria.....1-3
02.04.97.....Bulgaria-Cyprus.....4-1
08.06.97.....Bulgaria-Luxembourg.....4-0
20.08.97.....Bulgaria-Israel.....1-0
10.09.97.....Bulgaria-Russia.....1-0
11.10.97.....Russia-Bulgaria.....4-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
***Bulgaria**	**8**	**6**	**0**	**2**	**18**	**9**	**18**
Russia	8	5	2	1	19	5	17
Israel	8	4	1	3	9	7	13
Cyprus	8	3	1	4	10	15	10
Luxembourg	8	0	0	8	2	22	0

**Qualified as group winners*

Players used in qualifiers

Eight appearances T Ivanov, Kostadinov.
Seven Balakov, Kishishev, Yankov.
Six Lechkov, Zdravkov.
Five Ginchev, Yordanov.
Four Penev, Stoichkov.
Three Donkov, Mikhailov, I Petkov, Tsvetanov.
Two Antonov, Borimirov, Iliev, Vidolov.
One Gruyev, Hristov, Hubchev, G Ivanov, Mitov, M Petkov, Trendafilov, Zafrov.

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Five Balakov, Kostadinov.
One Borimirov, Gruyev, Iliev, T Ivanov, Lechkov, Penev, Stoichkov, Yordanov.

Reputation to live up to...Hristo Bonev

The Coach

Hristo BONEV

Bonev, now aged 50, certainly has a reputation to live up to. As a player he appeared 96 times for the national side between 1967 and 1977, scoring 47 goals. Four-times Footballer of the Year, he played most of his club football with his home-town club Lokomotiv Plovdiv, making a Bulgarian League record 410 appearances and scoring 206 goals. He also had a season with AEK Athens and returned to Plovdiv in 1983 to play another season before obtaining his coaching certificate. Had a spell as assistant national coach before succeeded Dimitar Penev in July 1996.

Goalkeepers

Borislav MIKHAILOV

Date of birth: 12.3.62. Club: Botev Plovdiv. 101 caps.

Injuries and personal problems made his stay with Reading less successful than it should have been, and he is now back in Bulgaria, though he does not appear very regularly for Plovdiv. Still a top keeper on his day, but a big questionmark hangs over his participation in France. Business interests in wig-making occupy much of his time (he is his own best advert).

Dimitar POPOV

27.2.70. Maritsa. 10 caps.

Challenged hard to succeed Mikhailov, but relegation with Maritsa last season means it will be a fight to make it to France.

Zdravko ZDRAVKOV

4.10.70. Slavia Sofia. 11 caps.

Now well-established as Mikhailov's successor, playing in six of eight qualifying matches, and has beat off a challenge from Popov. A generation younger than Mikhailov. Moved to Slavia three years ago from Levski.

Defenders

Georgi ANTONOV

7.7.70. Lok. Sofia. 5 caps (1 gl).

Two appearances in the qualifiers and a possible reserve in France.

Gosho GINCHEV

2.2.69. Antalyaspor (Tur). 13 caps.

Came to prominence in 1994-95 with Levski when the Sofia side won their third successive title. Then moved to Denizlispor in Turkey and won his second cap in the disastrous defeat by Germany in Berlin. Another transfer within Turkey (to Antalyaspor) appears to have helped his form and he was called up for half of the France 98 qualifiers.

Trifon IVANOV

27.7.65. Rapid Wien (Aut). 71 caps (6 gls).

A much-travelled tough defender. Long-haired and fearsome-looking, he is even more vital to the rearguard now that Peter Hubchev is out of contention. Spells at Neuchatel Xamax and a return to CSKA failed to satisfy the at-times turbulent Ivanov, who is a cult figure in Vienna. Helped Rapid to a Cup-winners Cup Final appearance in May 1996 and a few weeks later was one of the best Bulgarians at Euro 96. Watch out for his long-range free-kicks.

Radostin KISHISHEV

30.7.74. Bursaspor (Tur). 16 caps.

Ever-present last season for Neftochimik Burgas and only missed one international. The only domestic-based player who made the national team for the opening qualifying match against Israel. Has since moved to sample the delights of Turkish football.

Ivailo PETKOV

24.3.76. Liteks Lovech. 6 caps.

One of Bonev's up and coming young players and vital to the rejuvenation of the squad. Made his debut against Saudi Arabia in November 1996 and clinched a place on the left side of defence this season following impressive displays for newly-promoted Viteks, who he joined from Spartek Pleven last summer.

Tsanko TSVETANOV

6.1.70. Aberdeen (Sco). 40 caps.

Obtained what might be his last three caps in 1996-97 and his poor second half-season form raised eyebrows on Deeside last year. Previously with Waldhof in Mannheim and sometimes looked like a second division player in the latter of his 27 appearances there.

Zlatko YANKOV

7.6.66. Besiktas (Tur). 62 caps (4 gls).

Got back into the starting line-up for the final qualifying match, against Russia. Ex-Levski man who has been on his travels after a brief season back home following relegation from the Bundesliga with KFC Uerdingen. Experienced defender or defensive midfielder who only missed one game during USA 94.

Ivailo YORDANOV

12.1.66. Sporting Lisbon (Por). 28 caps (1 gl).

Veteran recalled for Euro 96 and has kept his place in the squad since. Seen by many as playing out his days in the warmth of Portugal, but has vowed to play on despite the news that he suffers from mulitple sclerosis.

Midfielders

Krasimir BALAKOV

29.3.66. VfB Stuttgart (Ger). 63 caps (12 gls).

Started in the Bulgarian League with home town club Etar and arrived in the Bundesliga in the summer of 1995 via Sporting Lisbon. Involved in the German title race, German Cup semi-finals and European Cup-winners Cup quarter-finals, so is not going to be easily available to Bonev for training sessions in the spring.

Daniel BORIMIROV

15.1.70. Munich 1860 (Ger). 35 caps (4 gls).

Attacking midfielder who moved to Munich in 1995 from Levski and has helped to keep 1860 in the Bundesliga.

Marian HRISTOV

29.7.73. Kaiserslautern (Ger). 5 cap (2 gls).

The best midfield creator in the Bulgarian League last season, scoring nine times for Levski and establishing himself in the national side. One of Bonev's men for the future who moved to the Bundesliga last summer.

Ilian ILIEV

2.7.68. Benfica (Por). 12 caps (1 gl).

A dozen caps but not exactly one of the new young guard Bonev is keen to introduce. In his second season in Portugal, previously a tower of strength for Levski. Will be knocking on the door for a place in France.

Yordan LECHKOV

9.7.67. Besiktas (Tur). 43 caps (5 gls).

Made his international debut against Greece in October 1989 and best known for the goal that knocked out the Germans in the USA. After spending much of his career at CSKA, he has three years with Hamburg before moving to Marseille, not most his successful stay abroad. Penev and Bonev have clung to Lechkov, but it is doubtful whether he will manage a full 90 minutes in France.

Anatoli NANKOV

15.7.69. CSKA Sofia. 10 caps.

Vidolov's attacking midfield partner as CSKA won the title last season, his third with the club. Will be challenging the veterans for a place in France.

Hristo STOICHKOV

8.2.66. Barcelona (Spa). 68 caps (35 gls).

What is there left to say about the man who was European Footballer of the Year and Bulgarian Sportsman of of the Year in 1994? Rather sadly that he is kicking his heels and not many balls in Barcelona at an age when he needs to be playing. Will be 32 by the time the World Cup finals begin and needs more regular match play if he is to last the pace in France. Last season was a poor one by his standards and he only played one full international, scoring once in the 4-0 win over Luxembourg. However, at least he and Bonev have buried the hatchet. Perhaps Barcelona coach Louis Van Gaal may have a change of mind in the new year too?

Kostadin VIDOLOV

2.5.70. Bursaspor (Tur). 8 caps (1 gl).

Has had limited opportunities with the national team but is gaining valuable experience with Bursaspor's 'Bulgar Colony' after one season with CSKA.

Forwards

Georgi DONKOV

2.6.70. VfL Bochum (Ger). 7 caps (1 gl).

Spells with Levski and Botev Plovdiv before a move to CSKA and now has a season and a half of Bundesliga action under his belt. A good second half of the season should see him in the World Cup squad.

Emil KOSTADINOV

12.8.67. Bursaspor (Tur). 65 caps (25 gls).

His goals got the Bulgarians to USA 94 and he showed against Russia in the qualifiers for France that he has not lost his touch. Began at CSKA and his wanderings have taken him to La Coruna, FC Porto, Bayern Munich, Fenerbahce and UNAM in Mexico. Ever-present in the qualifiers.

Luboslav PENEV

31.8.66. Compostela (Spa). 56 caps (12 gls).

A member of the squad for the best part of a decade who recovered from serious illness (cancer) to continue his career. Supported Stoichkov's boycott of the national team in a bid to have his uncle reinstated as national coach. Last season was a barren one (one cap) but he is now back and scored a vital goal in his return against Israel.

Veteran captain and Bulgar inspiration...Hristo Stoichkov

Cameroon

A chance to make amends

Mark Gleeson on Cameroon's bid to erase the memories of USA 94

IT WAS in the heat of Italy during the 1990 World Cup finals that Cameroon sent scorching shock waves through the international footballing fraternity with a quarter-final placing. Four years later, in the humidity of California, that reputation quickly dripped away as the much-vaunted Indomitable Lions suffered a six-goal hiding from Russia.

In just four years, Cameroon had gone from being trendsetters and heroic record-breakers for Africa to an embarrassment for their country and continent. What's more, the image of the team's squabbling for unpaid monies in the United States in 1994 supersedes the delightful jigs and jubilant faces of Roger Milla and company in Italy.

Cameroon, with their new coach Jean Manga Onguene and a new legion of players, have much to do in France to restore their image but at least they have been handed a draw which gives them a strong chance of making it through to the knockout stage. With the exception of Group B seeds Italy, whom they play in Montpellier in their second game, Cameroon must have a good hope of getting results against Austria, their first opponents, and Chile.

However, there is also a good chance, given the penchant for having a foreign adviser on hand for major events, that coach Onguene might be replaced by the time the World Cup kicks off.

Onguene is a former African Footballer of the Year, but more importantly he sat on the bench as one of the coaching assistants at Cameroon's last two World Cup appearances. The experience gives him an insider's view of the demands of the position and the capabilities needed to avoid a disaster like that suffered in California four years ago.

He is strong-willed, as has been shown by his team choices since taking over from Belgian Henri Depireux last July. Onguene has brought in several new players from among the many Europe-based Cameroonians who have a claim to play for the Indomitable Lions despite having learned their football in Europe.

This legion always seems to appear at about World Cup time, as is the case with Jamaica and other African countries such as Morocco and Nigeria.

The most impressive of the new faces is France-born Joseph-Desire Job, who has been a sensation at Lyon this year. The young striker turned down the chance to appear for France's Under-21 team in order to play for his parents' home country and he won his first cap for Cameroon in their friendly against England at Wembley in November. Job will probably combine up front with Patrick Mboma, another of the new-found Cameroonians, whose goals secured qualification for France.

Cameroon were fairly consistent in their team selection for the six World Cup qualifiers. Money is scarce in the central African country, ravaged as it is by financial scandal and corruption. Precious resources, particularly to buy the air tickets to bring over key players from Europe, were therefore used for the World Cup qualifiers, while the African Nations Cup qualifying campaign, played in tandem, proved more of a testing ground.

The concentration of funds towards France 98 qualification certainly paid off, with Cameroon remaining unbeaten in their group and winning it by a comfortable four points.

Last June and July, when several key games were played, was also holiday time for the Cameroonians playing in Europe, Mexico and Asia, and Onguene used the opportunity to snatch them away from family visits to experiment with various team combinations.

Money, or the lack of it, will also play a part in the team's preparation for France. They took what was virtually a B team to a quadrangular tournament in Haiti in October, where they performed poorly, and then had another makeshift team on display at Wembley, including four debutants, for the friendly international against England.

Over Christmas there was a short sojourn in Egypt and this month brings the African Nations Cup finals in Burkina Faso, where Onguene gets probably his only real chance to work with his players ahead of the summer.

Cameroon will have several players from previous World Cup finals available. Captain and goalkeeper Jacques Songo'o will be playing in his third tournament, despite having six of the best hit past him by the Russians last time out. The Deportivo La Coruna goalkeeper was a big hit in Spain last season and has developed into the same type of commanding figure as his predecessor, Joseph-Antoine Bell.

Defenders Raymond Kalla (now with Panahaiki in Greece) and Rigobert Song (Metz) will also be back on the world stage along with midfielder Marc-Vivien Foe (Lens) and the striker Alphonse Tchami (Hertha Berlin). Song has had a good season in France with the early League pacesetters and is developing into a world-class defender. Look out, too, for teenage full-back Pierre Nlend Wome, who has the makings of being a major star. He is currently learning the tricks of the trade with Lucchese in Italy's Serie B.

Mboma is the key, though. The Paris St Germain reject has been a sensation in the J.League with Gamba Osaka, for whom he scored almost a goal a game last year, and was equally proficient for Cameroon. Six goals in 10 internationals, all but two of them competitive matches, suggests he is the replacement for the likes of Roger Milla and Francois Omam-Biyik, who is desperately trying to find a club to launch his own comeback to the team in time for the summer. Omam-Biyik was previously playing in Mexico and has been hovering around France since his contract ended in search of new employ.

There will certainly be others like him, seeking to surface from the woodwork and claim a belated place in the squad for France. The World Cup finals are, after all, a great marketplace for the talents of African footballers and read impressively on any curriculum vitae. But Onguene, if he is still in charge come the first group game against Austria in Toulouse on June 11, will be wary of including too many high-profile fading stars in his starting line-up for fear of souring his own distinctive brew.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930-66 Did not enter.
1970 Did not qualify.
1974 Did not qualify.
1978 Did not qualify.
1982 1st round.
1986 Did not qualify.
1990 Quarter-finalists.
1994 1st round
Total Played 11 Won 3 Drawn 4 Lost 4
Goals for 11 Goals against 21

How they qualified

AFRICAN SECTION GROUP 4

10.11.96 .....Togo-Cameroon 2-4
12.01.97 .....Cameroon-Angola.....0-0
06.04.97 .....Cameroon-Zimbabwe.....1-0
27.04.97 .....Cameroon-Togo 2-0
08.06.97 .....Angola-Cameroon.....1-1
17.08.97 .....Zimbabwe-Cameroon.....1-2

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
***Cameroon**	**6**	**4**	**2**	**0**	**10**	**4**	**14**
Angola	6	2	4	0	7	4	10
Zimbabwe	6	1	1	4	6	7	4
Togo	6	1	1	4	6	14	4

**Qualified as group winners*

Players used in qualifiers

Six appearances Songo'o, Song, Mimboe, Mboma, Kalla.
Five Tchami, Wome.
Four Misse-Misse, Tchango, Tchoutang, Ndjitap, Mangan.
Three Foe, Billong.
Two Embe, Moreau.
One Omam-Biyik, Epalle, Etchi, Moukoko, Ousamou, Mpessa, Bella.

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Five Mboma.
Two Tchami.
One Misse-Misse, Embe, Tchoutang.

Boss – for now…Jean Manga Onguene

THE COACH

Jean Manga ONGUENE

African Footballer of the Year in 1980 who had a magnificent playing career as a striker with the Cameroon national side and the country's most popular club side, Canon Yaounde, with whom he won the African Cup-winners Cup and a hat-trick of African Champions Cups. A leg injury ruled him out of the Cameroon squad at the 1982 World Cup finals, but he was a coaching assistant at Italia 90 and USA 94 before taking over as national coach from Belgian Henri Depireux last July. Now aged 50, Onguene may yet lost out if the Cameroon Federation decides to appoint a high-profile coach for the France 98 finals.

GOALKEEPERS

Bruno NJEUKAM

Date of birth: 31.7.78. Club: Le Havre (Fra). 4 caps.

Signed for Le Havre at start of this season from Tonnerre Yaounde. Made international debut against Brazil in a friendly in November 1996 but did not play in any of the World Cup qualifiers.

Jacques SONGO'O

17.3.64. Deportivo La Coruna (Spa). 45 caps.

Made his debut against Angola in an Olympic Games qualifier 13 years ago but has had his international appearances curtailed by having to play second-fiddle to either Joseph-Antoine Bell or Thomas Nkono. Played in France before joining Deportivo last season, when he was named best keeper in the Primera Liga.

Vincent ONGANDZI

22.11.75. Unisport Bafang. 4 caps.

Member of the Cameroon squad at the 1996 African Nations Cup finals but did not play. Last appearance was against England at Wembley in November. Formerly with Tonnerre Yaounde.

DEFENDERS

Romarin BILLONG

11.6.70. St Etienne (Fra). 9 caps.

Born in neighbouring Chad of Cameroonian parents but raised in France. Played for Lyon before joining St Etienne. Did not commit to play for the Indomitable Lions until last year when he made his debut against Angola in the World Cup qualifier in Yaounde. Played in three France 98 qualifiers altogether.

Ernest Oben ETCHI

4.6.75. Cotonsport. 10 caps.

Won the Cameroon League championship with his club in 1996 and made his international debut the same month as a substitute against Brazil in Curitiba. Played in just one of the qualifiers for France 98.

Raymond KALLA

22.4.75. Panahaiki (Gre). 21 caps (1 gl).

Burst into the team as a teenager just before USA 94, where he played in all three matches. Club commitments have limited his appearances for the Lions since but he did play in all six of the qualifiers for France. Scored a goal on debut away against South Korea in May 1994. First played for Canon Yaounde.

Tobie MIMBOE

30.6.64. Cerro Porteno (Par). 32 caps.

Formerly with Olympic Mvolye and had a spell in Argentina. International debut against Zaire four years ago and has played in almost all the Cameroon's matches since, including the last African Nations Cup finals in South Africa and all the qualifiers for the World Cup.

Rigobert SONG

1.7.76. Metz (Fra). 20 caps.

Like defensive partner Kalla, he was a surprise inclusion in the squad for the USA 94, aged just 17. In the game there against Brazil he became the youngest player to be sent off at any World Cup finals. Signed by Metz from Tonnerre Yaounde after the tournament. A member of the African Nations Cup squad in 1996.

Pierre Nlend WOME

26.3.79. Lucchese (Ita). 19 caps.

Made his international debut aged 16 years and three months and held the record for being the youngest player to appear at the African Nations Cup finals for a day before it was broken again by Sierra Leone's Mohammed Kallon. Strong-tackling player, who got two red cards in Cameroon colours in 1997. Played two matches for Vicenza in Serie A in 96-97 before being loaned to Lucchese of Serie B.

MIDFIELDERS

Jean-Jacques ETAME

23.11.66. Bastia (Fra). 1 cap.

Born in Strasbourg and is a regular fixture in the French First Division. Previously with Cannes. Made his international debut against England at Wembley in November.

Marc-Vivien FOE

1.5.75. Lens (Fra). 32 caps.

Started his career at Canon Yaounde and made 26 League appearances for Lens last season. Played at the last World Cup finals and at the 1996 African Nations Cup finals in South Africa.

Samuel IPOUA

1.3.73. Rapid Vienna (Aut). 1 cap.

Also born in France. Played for Nice before transferring to Austria, where he was recently suspended for a butting incident. Brought into the team against England in November.

Cyrille MANGAN

13.9.76. Xanthi (Gre). 8 caps (1 gl).

Made international debut at the start of the recent African Nations Cup qualifying campaign and also played in four World Cup qualifiers. Scored against Gabon last June.

Geremi Fotso NDJITAP

20.12.78. Genclerbirligi (Tur). 10 caps.

Graduated from the Under-20 team who won the African championship in Mali in 1995. Made full debut against Gabon in October 1996 and has been regular squad member since. Signed for Genclerbirligi at the start of the current Turkish season.

Salomon OLEMBE

8.12.80. Nantes (Fra). 2 caps (1 gl).

Youngest-ever international to appear at Wembley. Made his debut and scored against Cuba in the quadrangular tournament in Haiti in October. Carefully guarded by his club when he visited London and was whisked away in a private jet straight after the game.

Guy TAPOKO

25.12.68. Laval (Fra). 16 caps.

Made international debut eight years ago and played in the team that finished fourth at the 1992 African Nations Cup finals in Senegal. Since moving to France has played sparingly for the national team, with only one game in the past three years – against Namibia in July.

Joseph TCHANGO

28.11.78. Tecos (Mex). 14 caps (1 gl).

Another African champion at Under-20 level in 1995 and a League champion with Cotonsport. Included in the squad for the last Nations Cup finals but played just the opening match. Scored the goal against Namibia that sealed Cameroon's place at this month's Nations Cup finals.

Bernard TCHOUTANG

2.9.76. Not under contract. 11 caps (3 gls).

Recently failed to gain a contract after trials at MSV Duisburg and released earlier in the season by struggling Turkish club Vanspor. Former Under-20 player with the African championship-winning side. Made full debut before USA 94 but not chosen for that World Cup squad. Played four times in the qualifiers for France.

FORWARDS

Nicholas DIKOUMBE

4.11.73. Apollon (Gre). 16 caps (2 gls).

Made debut eight years ago but did not play again until 1994, in the African Nations Cup qualifying campaign, before being left out of the final squad for the South Africa finals. Called up by Onguene for the recent LG Cup tournament in Tunisia.

David EMBE

13.11.73. Guadalajara (Mex). 14 caps (2 gls).

Much-travelled striker. Formerly with Rennes in France and spent two seasons at Larissa in Greece. Played at the last World Cup finals but has not been a regular in the Cameroon team since.

Joseph-Desire JOB

1.12.77. Lyon (Fra). 1 cap.

Born in Venissieux in France. Made French First Division debut in August for Lyon against Metz, and five goals in 12 matches have made him the season's sensation. Turned down a call-up from the French Under-21 team in order to play for Cameroon, and won his first cap against England in November.

Patrick MBOMA

15.11.70. Gamba Osaka (Jap). 10 caps (6 gls).

Top scorer in the African qualifiers for France with five goals. Also top in the J.League in 1997 with 25 goals in 28 matches. Born in Cameroon but raised in France. Played for Metz and PSG before moving to Japan. Cameroon first called him up just days before the 1996 African Nations Cup finals but he did not impress in a friendly against Liberia and was left behind. Recalled at the start of the World Cup qualifiers and basically carried Cameroon through to France.

Augustine SIMO

18.9.78. St Etienne (Fra). 9 caps (1 gl).

Formerly with Torino (Italy) and Lugano (Switzerland). African Under-20 championship winner in 1995. Made full international debut against Malawi in 1995 and played in all three matches at last Nations Cup finals. The emergence of Mboma has seen him lose his place in the first team. Scored the goal against Zimbabwe that took Cameroon through to the 1996 African Nations Cup finals in South Africa.

Alphonse TCHAMI

14.9.71. Hertha Berlin (Ger). 27 caps (7 gls).

Injury has restricted his appearances of late but he is an experienced team member, having played at USA 94 and the 1996 African Nations Cup finals. Played for Velje and Odense in Denmark and Boca Juniors in Argentina before going to the Bundesliga this season. Scored on his international debut against Swaziland in 1992 and has scored a total of six goals in World Cup qualifiers for both the USA and France.

Commanding presence…captain and No. 1 goalkeeper Jacques Songo'o

Chile

Governed by the fear factor

The Chileans have a fearsome attack but little else to offer, says Eric Weil

CHILE return to the World Cup finals for the first time in 16 years after scraping through on the last day of qualifying in fourth place, ahead of Peru on goal difference in the nine-team South American group. However, they will go to France with what every coach dreams of – a double-pronged attack with two outstanding strikers.

The strikeforce in question is, of course, the feared 'Za-Sa' partnership of Ivan Zamorano and Marcelo Salas, on whose backs Chile reached France. The much sought-after Zamorano, who plays for Internazionale in Italy, and Sales, who lines up for Argentinian champions River Plate and is being wooed by several European clubs, finished as leading scorers in the South American qualifying section with 12 and 11 goals respectively out of the 32 scored by Chile – which also made Chile top scorers in the group.

Chile were banned by FIFA from the 1994 World Cup as a result of an incident when they faced Brazil in a qualifying match in Rio de Janeiro for the 1990 match. It was alleged that Chilean goalkeeper Roberto Rojas feigned injury from a smoke bomb as he was carried off during that match. It was also alleged that other Chilean players knew about the arrangement. The ban hit Chilean soccer badly and performances in subsequent South American championships have been poor.

This time Chile were hardly among the candidates to qualify – they took the place expected to go to Uruguay – and in their first game they were within a minute of losing to a weak Venezuela side who did not win a single game in the entire section. Zamorano scored the equaliser just on time, but the result led to the sacking of Spanish coach Xavier Azkargorta, who had taken Bolivia to the 1994 finals, and the appointment of Nelson Acosta, a naturalised Chilean born in Uruguay.

But it was not easy after that either. Defeats by Colombia and Paraguay left Chile in a delicate position and although they moved up the table later, they hovered around the qualifying line until the end, with several countries in the running. Furthermore, first Salas and then Zamorano were sidelined with injuries, which blunted their main weapon. And in the weeks before the vital penultimate game against Peru – which Chile had to win to stay in contention – a players strike hampered preparations.

There are huge questionmarks about Chile's possible success in the World Cup finals. Coach Acosta says he will be satisfied if they qualify for the second round from their group – which also includes Italy, Cameroon and Austria – something which Chile has not managed to do since the finals were held on their home ground in 1962, when they finished third. It also means they would have to win a match – another thing Chile have not managed in World Cup finals since 1962.

Acosta's gameplan for qualifying was to win at home – which they did except against Argentina – and avoid defeat away. Chile had a 6-0-1 home record, but only 0-4-4 away in France 98 qualifying. So Chile appeared to be poor performers on the road and there are no home matches in the World Cup finals for them.

Zamorano and Salas actually only played together in five of the 16 World Cup qualifying matches because of injuries to one or the other, but this was still enough to show their awesome attacking power. Zamorano, especially, has been injury-prone over the past year. He scored his 12 goals in 10 matches and was absent for the vital last four games. Salas, who was absent injured for several games early last year, scored his 11 goals in 13 games.

Chile have a natural replacement for Zamorano and Salas in Sebastian Rozental, another outstanding goal-scoring striker now with Rangers in Scotland. However, it remains to be seen how he shapes up after being out of football for seven months (and two operations for torn ligaments) although he was due to resume training at the beginning of January.

Behind the attack, however, Chile do not really have any world-class players, with the exception of defender Javier Margas, who was recently chosen by FIFA to play in the all-star match that preceded the World Cup draw. He is the only defender of class while goalkeepers Nelson Tapas or Marcelo Ramirez are good but not outstanding.

The midfield does not function well either and lacks a leader. This means that Salas and Zamorano, however dangerous they might be, often lack the necessary service from behind, in spite of having an experienced playmaker in Marcelo Vega in the middle. On top of that, the full-backs – lately Cristian Castaneda and Miguel Ponce – are average markers and not good at joining attacks.

Acosta says he is not satisfied with the team. He used 44 players in the 16 qualifying games, but 18 of them only once or twice. The coach has one advantage over other South American qualifiers in that not so many of the players are with foreign clubs – perhaps only two or three of his final choice. But Acosta says that when he picks the squad to prepare for the finals, it will include a number of new faces – younger players who he did not pick before because five days together before a match, as was the case during World Cup qualifying, was not enough time to integrate them into the team.

Acosta says that of the players which got Chile into the finals only goalkeeper Tapia, defender Pedro Reyes and midfielder Luis Mussri have their World Cup place assured alongside strikers Zamorano, Salas and Rozental.

Chile have been playing 4-3-1-2 with two full-backs joining the attack at every opportunity (although, as mentioned above, they doing it deficiently) and forwards who have to help a lot in winning the ball back. The team know their limitations and their tactics are to press the opposition, trying to frighten them with their well-known lethal attack, keeping play away from the defence as much as possible and hoping defensive flaws do not show up too much.

FOR THE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 1st round; **1934** Did not enter; **1938** Did not enter; **1950** 1st round; **1954** Did not enter; **1958** Did not qualify; **1962** Semi-finalists/3rd place; **1966** 1st round; **1970** Did not qualify; **1974** 1st round; **1978** Did not qualify; **1982** 2nd round; **1986** Did not qualify; **1990** Did not qualify; **1994** Did not enter

Total Played 21 Won 7 Drawn 3 Lost 11 Goals for 26 Goals against 32

How they qualified

SOUTH AMERICAN SECTION

02.06.96	Venezuela-Chile	1-1
07.07.96	Chile-Ecuador	4-1
01.09.96	Colombia-Chile	4-1
09.10.96	Paraguay-Chile	2-1
12.11.96	Chile-Uruguay	1-0
15.12.96	Argentina-Chile	1-1
12.01.97	Peru-Chile	2-1
12.02.97	Bolivia-Chile	1-1
30.04.97	Chile-Venezuela	4-1
08.06.97	Ecuador-Chile	1-1
06.07.97	Chile-Colombia	4-1
20.07.97	Chile-Paraguay	2-1
20.08.97	Uruguay-Chile	1-0
10.09.97	Chile-Argentina	1-2
12.10.97	Chile-Peru	4-0
16.11.97	Chile-Bolivia	3-0

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Argentina	16	8	6	2	23	13	30
Paraguay	16	9	2	5	21	14	29
Colombia	16	8	4	4	23	15	28
***Chile**	**16**	**7**	**4**	**5**	**32**	**18**	**25**
Peru	16	7	4	5	19	20	25
Ecuador	16	6	3	7	22	21	21
Uruguay	16	6	3	7	18	21	21
Bolivia	16	4	5	7	18	21	17
Venezuela	16	0	3	13	8	41	3

**Qualified in fourth place*

Players used in qualifiers

Fourteen appearances Tapia.
Twelve C Castenada, Mussri, Salas.
Eleven Margas, Reyes.
Ten Vega, Zamorano.
Nine Fuentes, V Castenada, Cornejo.
Seven Acuna, Sierra.
Six Contreras, Miranda, Mora, Ponce, Valencia.
Five J Gonzalez, Rozental.
Four Estay.
Three Chavarria, Goldberg, P Gonzalez, Nunez, Rojas.
Two Barrera, Carreno, Mendoza, Paraguez, Ramirez, Riveros, Vergara.
One Basay, Chong, Flores, Neza, Perez, Ramirez, Rivero, Romero, Ruiz, Vilches, Villaroel.

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Twelve Zamorano. **Eleven** Salas.
Two Maragas, Reyes. **One** Barrera, Carreno, Cornejo, Estay, P Gonzalez.

Mr motivator...coach Nelson Acosta

The Coach

Nelson ACOSTA
Took over from Spaniard Xavier Azkargorta in May 1996 after Chile almost lost their opening qualifying match against Venezuela. Uruguayan-born Acosta, 53, who has lived in Chile for the last 20 years and has taken out Chilean nationality, had never coached a national team or a big club before, but he was apparently chosen for his ability to motivate players. He had previously coached Union Espanola, one of the lesser-known Santiago clubs.

Goalkeepers

Marcelo RAMIREZ
Date of birth: 29.5.65. Club: Colo Colo. 10 caps.
Undoubtedly the second best goalkeeper in the Chilean League (after Tapia) but less experienced.

Nelson TAPIA
22.9.66. Universidad Catolica. 24 caps.
The best Chilean goalkeeper in the League, experienced but not against the world's strongest sides. Competent but not exceptional.

Defenders

Cristian CASTENADA
18.9.68. Univ. de Chile. 17 caps (1 gl).
Full-back who is not a great marker and finds it difficult to link up with attackers, but the most experienced player available in his position.

Wilson CONTRERAS
Aged 32. Huachipato. 5 caps.
A possible reserve for defensive positions but who did not shine in any of his four appearances in qualifying matches.

Nelson PARAGUEZ
5.4.71 Univ. Catolica. 18 caps.
A full-back used recently as a substitute, but no better than any of the first-choice defenders.

Ronald FUENTES
22.6.69. Univ. de Chile. 26 caps (1 gl).
Central defender who alternates with Pedro Reyes in one of the weak departments of the team.

Jorge GOMEZ
Aged 29. Temuco. 2 caps.
Could be a reserve in France although he did not play in any qualifying games. Good at club level but, and this could be said for most of the defence, is hardly good enough against strong international opposition.

Javier MARGAS
10.5.69. Univ. Catolica. 42 caps (3 gls).
The country's best defender and world-class – he was chosen for the recent all-star game before the World Cup draw. Experienced and will stop opponents by fair means or foul in central defence. Necessarily a hard worker as rest of defence is not up to the same standard.

Miguel PONCE
19.8.71. Univ. Catolica. 8 caps.
The most likely left-back as he was chosen for the last six qualifying matches. Like the other full-back Cristian Castenada, his strong point is not tackling and he does not link up well with the attack.

Miguel RAMIREZ
11.6.70. Univ. Catolica. 33 caps (1 gl).
One of the most experienced defenders in the squad and a regular until Acosta took over as coach and started to pick what he considers are more promising players. Suffers from same problem as rest of defence in that he lacks the technique to face strong opposition.

Pedro REYES
13.11.72. Colo Colo. 12 caps (2 gls).
The likely first-choice central defender, alternating with Ronald Fuentes.

Ricardo ROJA
Aged 23. Univ. de Chile. 7 caps.
Member of a strong club defence, but with little international experience and a possible reserve. Did not play in any qualifying games.

Francisco ROJAS
22.7.74. Colo Colo. 6 caps.
Puts in good performances for his club, but has not stood out for the national side. Needs more experience and is likely to be a reserve in France.

Midfielders

Clarence ACUNA
8.2.75. Univ. de Chile. 14 caps.
Promising attacking midfielder and one of the younger generation of players raising the standard of Chilean soccer. A regular for the last seven qualifying games, but still lacks experience. Combines with Mussri to create attacks.

Victor CASTENADA
6.7.62. Univ. de Chile. 10 caps.
Attacking midfielder who combines well with Vega and Salas when he is not marked too tightly.

Fernando CORNEJO
28.1.69. Cobreloa. 14 caps (2 gls).
Strong midfielder generally used as a substitute to give the midfield a second wind.

Luis MUSSRI
24.12.69. Univ. de Chile. 22 caps.
Used as a libero and one of the more experienced players in the squad. Quite capable in his position, but not outstanding.

Mario SALAS
11.10.67. Colo Colo. 6 caps.
A useful player, good at club level, who has not been called up since Acosta took over, but who may well get his chance as the coach searches for a stronger midfield.

Jose Luis SIERRA
5.12.68. Colo Colo. 21 caps (2 gls).
One of an older generation who is gradually making way for younger players.

Esteban VALENCIA
8.1.72. Univ. de Chile. 25 caps (3 gls).
Experienced midfielder, but below World Cup standards.

Marcelo VEGA
12.8.71. Wanderers. 21 caps (1 gl).
The man who plays behind the main strikers Salas and Zamorano and serves as a link between attack and midfield. Has experience and great passing ability, but the attack suffers when he is marked out of the game as the rest of midfield is not up to the same standard.

Forwards

Rodrigo BARRERA
3.3.70. Univ de Chile. 9 caps (1 gl).
Fast striker and most likely reserve for Zamorano who played particularly well in the final qualifier (only his second) alongside Salas, scoring the vital first goal which calmed the nerves in a 'must win' match against Bolivia.

Juan CARRENO
Aged 29. Concepcion. 12 caps (1 gl).
Generally used a substitute, but below the standard of Zamorano, Salas and Nunez.

Rodrigo GOLDBERG
9.8.71. Maccabi Tel Aviv (Isr). 10 caps (5 gls).
An outstanding striker with Univ. de Chile before he left to play lower-class soccer in Israel. Did not play in any World Cup qualifying games and may not make the World Cup squad, especially in view of the other forwards available.

Claudio NUNEZ
16.10.75. Leon (Mex). 10 caps.
A very promising young striker who left Chile early in his career and played in five qualifying games. A possible successor to Zamorano who will, however, have few chances while he (and Salas) are still around.

Sebastian ROZENTAL
1.9.76. Rangers (Sco). 20 caps (2 gls).
One of Chile's most exciting newcomers, along with Salas, who soon caught the eyes of the outside world with his goalscoring ability. Has failed to impress since leaving Chile and there will be a questionmark over his fitness following a seven-month lay-off and two ligament operations.

Danger man...Marcelo Salas

Rodrigo RUIZ
Aged 25. Tigres (Mex). 5 caps.
Tried out in one France 98 qualifer, but unlikely to make the final squad.

Marcelo SALAS
24.12.74. River Plate (Arg). 31 caps (19 gls).
Chile's other main weapon (with Zamorano) and a prolific scorer nicknamed 'Matador' (killer). The second-highest scorer in the South American qualifying tournament with 10 goals in 13 games, missing the other three matches through injury. Is closing in on 150 first-class goals in spite of a short career which began in with Temuco in Chile in 1992. Like Zamorano, a potential star in France and much sought after by European clubs.

Fernando VERGARA
13.5.70. Colo Colo. 5 caps.
Stands out in attack for his club, but played in only one qualifying match and is unlikely to make the final World Cup squad.

Ivan ZAMORANO
18.1.67. Internazionale (Ita). 37 caps (23 gls).
A world-class striker who needs no introduction. Former top scorer in the Spanish League and top marksman in the South American World Cup qualifying tournament with 12 goals, although he played in only 10 games because of injury. A danger anywhere near goal, honouring his nickname 'Bam Bam', but he has lately been injury-prone, which forced him to miss the last four qualifiers. Is Chile's main weapon, along with Marcelo Salas, and could be one of the stars of the France 98 finals if he steers clear of injury. Because of age and Chile's ban from the 1994 World Cup, this is likely to be his last World Cup.

Colombia

Still the Valderrama show

Carlos kicks a ball like no other for the Colombians, says Eric Weil

COLOMBIA reached the World Cup finals for the third consecutive time – and fourth time in all – with a team remarkably similar to the ones which lined up in Italy in 1990 and the USA in 1994.

Still there is Carlos Valderrama, the captain and veteran of the team at 36, still with the same flaming orange hair which makes him stand out anywhere and who last year joined the 100 club with 103 caps at the end of the World Cup qualifying tournament.

In fact, 16 of the 22-man squad from the 1994 World Cup finals took part in qualifying games this time around. They included the veterans Freddy Rincon, Antony De Avila, Leonel Alvarez, Adolfo Valencia, Wilmer Cabrera and Wilson Perez – all 1990 survivors and all over 30, although Perez may miss the trip to France.

In 1995 Perez was detained by police at Barranquilla airport with drugs in his possession. Although he was later allowed by the judge handling the case to train and play for his club, America, and the national team, the player has now been sentenced to 50 months in prison, pending an appeal, for drug trafficking. The absence of the full-back would be an important loss to the team.

That is one problem resulting from Colombian soccer's continual links with drugs traffickers and betting run by the same gangs. The drugs gangs were also connected with the murder of defender Andres Escobar after he scored an own goal in the 1994 finals, during which the team also received continual death threats. The links between drugs and soccer have loosened somewhat of late as a result of strong government action – one factor which should help Colombia to have a happier World Cup this time around.

Colombia went to the 1994 finals as one of the favourites to win the World Cup and flopped badly. However, their selection as candidates to take the title in 1994 was based almost entirely on one result – a 5-0 victory over Argentina in Buenos Aires during the qualifying tournament. This time they are not counted among the favourites and, with the presure off, this could well benefit the team.

Colombia began the qualifying campaign for France 98 in great style, with 17 points and a 5-2-0 record. They appeared to be running away with the South American qualifying group, but then came a slump of four defeats and a draw when Faustino Asprilla – undoubtedly their danger man – missed some games, was sent off in another and generally lost his scoring touch.

Asprilla finished as Colombia's top scorer in the World Cup qualifying games with seven goals, but six of these were scored in the first five games. Usually safe goalkeeper Farid Mondragon was also blamed for mistakes which led to defeats and he was replaced by Oscar Cordoba for the final three games which were won – two of them just – and Colombia qualified in third place in the qualifiying group.

There has not only been continuity with the players, but also with the coach.

Hernan Dario Gomez was assistant coach to Francisco Maturana in 1990 and 1994 World Cups and took over from Maturana when he left to coach Ecuador for the France 98 qualifying campaign. But the association between the two had begun a lot earlier at leading Colombian club Nacional and indeed Gomez led Nacional to the Libertadores Cup – still the only Colombian club to have won the South American club title – in 1990, after Maturana had left to become national team coach.

So it is not surprising that the playing style has not changed much either. But while Maturana was more of a soccer idealist, who liked to copy Brazil's 'beautiful game', Gomez has a more pragmatic approach. The team could have perhaps done with the Gomez approach in 1994, but they are now more practical and, as a result, a more solid side.

Despite the more pragmatic style, Colombia are still one of the better ball-playing teams in the world. They seldom waste a pass and move the ball aorund until they find an opening which their sharp-shooters can make use of. They are an attacking team who appear slow but are quick on the counter-attack. The whole team revolves around Valderrama, who walks around the field, laying off perfect passes. However, when the occasion arises, he can certainly surprise the opposition with his running – as he showed against Argentina when he scored the opening goal in a 1-1 draw.

Colombia line up with a 4-4-2 formation, but they often defend with 4-3-3, getting ready for a counter-attack, and they attack with 3-1-3-3.

The newer players have fitted in well with the experienced veterans. Harold Lozano has become a powerful force in midfield and Hamilton Ricard is an exciting forward, although for now Gomez relies more on the older guard of Asprilla, Victor Aristazabal or Antony De Avila in attack.

But however good they are, the team does not click same way without Valderrama, nor have Colombia found a replacement for the 36-year-old midfielder who says he intends to retire from international football after the World Cup finals.

Colombia were criticised in 1994 for not arranging tough enough friendly opposition in the run-up to the finals in the USA. Coach Gomez wants no such criticism this time around, especially given that his side have strong European group rivals in England and Romania.

To that end, away matches are planned against Mexico on March 11, Republic of Ireland on March 25, Germany on May 30 and Belgium on June 3. Newcastle United will be their opponents on March 22. A four-team tournament is planned for Bogota in April, with one visitor from Europe, South America and Africa.

FORTHE RECORD

World Cup finals record

1930 Did not enter; **1934** Did not enter; **1938** Did not enter; **1950** Did not enter; **1954** Did not enter; **1958** Did not qualify; **1962** 1st round; **1966** Did not qualify; **1970** Did not qualify; **1974** Did not qualify; **1978** Did not qualify; **1982** Did not qualify; **1986** Did not qualify; **1990** 2nd round; **1994** 1st round.

Total Played 10 Won 2 Drawn 2 Lost 6 Goals for 13 Goals against 21

How they qualified

SOUTH AMERICAN SECTION

24.04.96	Colombia-Paraguay	1-0
02.06.96	Peru-Colombia	1-1
07.07.96	Colombia-Uruguay	3-1
01.09.96	Colombia-Chile	4-1
09.10.96	Ecuador-Colombia	0-1
10.11.96	Bolivia-Colombia	2-2
15.12.96	Venezuela-Colombia	0-2
12.02.97	Colombia-Argentina	0-1
02.04.97	Paraguay-Colombia	2-1
30.04.97	Colombia-Peru	0-1
08.06.97	Uruguay-Colombia	1-1
06.07.97	Chile-Colombia	4-1
20.07.97	Colombia-Ecuador	1-0
20.08.97	Colombia-Bolivia	3-0
10.09.97	Colombia-Venezuela	1-0
16.11.97	Argentina-Colombia	1-1

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Argentina	16	8	6	2	23	13	30
Paraguay	16	9	2	5	21	14	29
***Colombia**	**16**	**8**	**4**	**4**	**23**	**15**	**28**
Chile	16	7	4	5	32	18	25
Peru	16	7	4	5	19	20	25
Ecuador	16	6	3	7	22	21	21
Uruguay	16	6	3	7	18	21	21
Bolivia	16	4	5	7	18	21	17
Venezuela	16	0	3	13	8	41	3

**Qualified as third of four qualifiers*

Players used in qualifiers

Sixteen appearances Valderrama.
Fifteen Bermudez.
Twelve F Asprilla, Cabrera, Mondragon, Rincon, Serna.
Eleven De Avila.
Nine Alvarez, Aristizabal, Galeano.
Eight Mendoza.
Seven Lozano, Moreno.
Six Pacheco, Ricard.
Five Lopez, Perez.
Four Estrada, O Cordoba, Santa, Valencia.
Three Bolano, I Cordoba, Gavivria, Valenciano.
Two Angel.
One C Asprilla, Bonilla, Calero, Escobar, Herrera, Mafia, Morantes, Palacios, Ramirez, Ramiro, .

Goalscorers in qualifiers

Seven F Asprilla.
Three De Avila, Valderrama.
Two Bermudez, Ricard, Serna.
One Aristizabal, Cabrera, Rincon, Valenciano.

Top job...Hernan Dario Gomez

The Coach

Hernan Dario GOMEZ
Assistant to Francisco Maturana in both the 1990 and 1994 World Cups and before that with one of Colombia's leading clubs, Atletico Nacional. Under Gomez in 1989, Nacional became the only Colombian club to win the Libertadores Cup. Gomez, in turn, took over as national coach in 1995 when Maturana left to take charge of Ecuador. Gomez has a more pragmatic approach to the game and under him Colombia are playing a slightly more practical game than the pretty soccer they were known for before.

Goalkeepers

Oscar CORDOBA
3.2.70. Boca Juniors (Arg). 44 caps.
The current number one whose excellent performances caught the eye of one of Argentina's leading clubs. Played in the last four France 98 qualifiers to everybody's satisfaction.

Rene HIGUITA
28.8.66. Veracruz (Mex). 66 caps.
Well-known for his spectacular saves, taking the ball upfield and scoring from free-kicks, as well as penalties for club and country. He seems to have gained a new lease of life with his latest Mexican club after being dismissed from the Colombian national side and then his club, Nacional, for missing training.

Farid MONDRAGON
21.6.71. Independiente (Arg). 21 caps.
Tall, athletic and safe. Became first-choice following excellent performances in the Argentinian League. However, some vital mistakes, which resulted in defeats in World Cup qualifiers, led to him being replaced after 12 matches of the qualifying campaign by the former incumbent, Oscar Cordoba.

Defenders

Jorge BERMUDEZ
20.5.70. Boca Juniors (Arg). 39 caps (3 gls).
Safe and strong central defender – the best in the country, in fact. Played in 15 qualifiers, scoring twice.

Wilmer CABRERA
15.9.67. Independiente Medellin. 39 caps (2 gls).
Full-back and likely first-choice in an experienced defence which is sometimes slow at moving into attack.

Ivan CORDOBA
11.8.76. Atletico Nacional. 9 caps.
Young and improving central defender who stepped into the team for the last four qualifiers.

Hugo GALEANO
26.8.70. Atletico Junior. 15 caps.
Played in nine qualifiers and is a good option, with experience, for covering all the defensive positions.

Luis HERRERA
12.6.62. Nacional. 26 caps.
Strong defender at club level, but getting past his best.

Alexis MENDOZA
8.11.61. Veracruz. 67 caps (2 gls).
Experienced central defender who is aiming for his third successive World Cup finals, although he may not make the starting line-up this time.

Antonio MORENO
25.10.70. Tolima. 12 caps.
Played in seven qualifiers in place of Perez, but does not have the same qualities or experience.

Francisco MOSQUERA
5.11.73. Atletico National. 1 cap.
Good attacking defender at club level who did not play in the World Cup qualifiers and whose only cap did not provide enough evidence of his abilities.

Wilson PEREZ
6.8.67. Unicosta. 37 caps.
Experienced, regular full-back who may, however, not be in the World Cup squad as he was caught with drugs in his possession in 1995. Although he was allowed to carry on playing, he was sentenced to 50 months in jail in December, pending an appeal, for drug trafficking.

Jose SANTA
12.11.70. Atletico Nacional. 22 caps.
Part of a strong club defence and could be a likely experienced reserve.

Midfielders

Leonel ALVAREZ
29.7.65. America. 70 caps (1 gl).
Experienced midfielder and playmaker, veteran of two World Cups, but may be only substitute in his third. Good understanding with Valderrama because of a long association, but now getting past his best.

Andres ESTRADA
12.10.67. Deportivo Cali. 14 caps.
Played in five qualifiers, but unlikely to be first choice. Better ball control than marking and tackling.

Hernan GAVIRIA
27.11.69. Atletico Nacional. 22 caps (3 gls).
Aggressive ball-winner who played in three qualifiers.

Harold LOZANO
30.3.72. Real Vallodolid (Spa). 30 caps (3 gls).
Useful attacking midfielder who was in the 1994 World Cup squad after showing excellent form in the Colombian League, but has not been used as regularly since he moved to play abroad.

Neider MORANTES
3.8.75. Atletico Nacional. 6 caps (2 gls).
One of the newcomers who was tried in one World Cup qualifier and so still lacks experience. Not yet given a chance to show his ability.

Victor PACHECO
Aged 24. Atletico Junior. 11 caps.
Excellent attacking midfielder who combines well with Valderrama (when he plays for Junior) and the forwards. Likely reserve for Rincon.

Luis QUINONES
5.10.68. Deportes Tolima. 17 caps (4 gls).
Possible reserve midfielder used twice in the qualifying campaign.

Freddy RINCON
14.8.66. Corinthians (Bra). 72 caps (16 gls).
The perfect partner for Valderrama as an attacking half. A tall player who tends to walk rather than run with his long legs and big strides, but is difficult to catch when he gets going. Is better attacking than tackling and defending. A veteran of two World Cup finals who played in 11 qualifiers, scoring only once, although he tends to score more goals. Now playing in Brazil after an unsuccessful spell in Europe.

Mauricio SERNA
22.1.68. At. Nacional. 35 caps (2 gls).
Useful defensive midfielder who played in six World Cup qualifiers.

Carlos VALDERRAMA
2.9.61. Miami Fusion (USA). 103 caps (10 gls).
A veteran of two World Cups who needs no introduction. His flaming dyed-orange hair stands out anywhere, but he really stands out on the field for his excellent passing and reading of the game. All Colombia's attacks seem to go through him at some stage. His style is deceptive, walking around the field barely breaking into a run, yet he always turns up in the right place when needed. The team is not the same without him and he is hard to mark even when he moves slowly.

Forwards

Faustino ASPRILLA
10.11.69. Newcastle Utd (Eng). 37 caps (15 gls).
Oustanding ball-controller, dangerous scorer and one of the few Colombians to have been successful in Europe. Played in the last World Cup and was the team's leading scorer with seven goals in 12 France 98 qualifiers, missing some games through injury. Indisciplined on and off the pitch and has been suspended from the national team in the past.

Main threat...Faustino Asprilla

Victor ARISTIZABAL
9.12.71. Sao Paulo (Bra). 39 caps (5 gls).
Another skilful ball player but not such a frequent scorer as Asprilla as he tends to hold on to the ball too long. Played in the last World Cup and expected to partner Asprilla in attack.

Antony DE AVILA
21.12.62. NY/NJ Metrostars (USA). 59 caps (16 gls).
Skilful striker and goalscorer who played in 1994 World Cup and 12 qualifiers this time around, scoring three goals. A likely reserve for Asprilla.

Osvaldo MACKENZIE
19.1.73. Atletico Junior. Uncapped.
Good attacking partner to Valenciano at club level, but has not yet been given the chance to show his skills in the national team.

Hamilton RICARD
Aged 23. Deportivo Cali. 17 caps (5 gls).
One of the newer generation of dangerous forwards who played in six qualifiers, scoring twice.

Ivan VALENCIANO
18.3.72. Atletico Junior. 47 caps (9 gls).
Dangerous striker with an eye for goal who has been top scorer in the League several times and has well over 100 League goals to his credit, having formed an excellent partnership with Vaderrama and Mackenzie in the League. A member of the 1994 World Cup squad, but is not an automatic choice for the national team beacuse of the presence of more skilful players.

Luis ZULETA
Aged 23. Union Magdalena. 4 caps.
Striker who has shown good league form, but did not feature in the qualifying campaign.

Bordeaux Parc Lescure

PARC LESCURE will host five group matches (Italy-Chile, Scotland-Norway, Belgium-Mexico, South Africa-Saudi Arabia and Argentina-Croatia) and one second round tie.

The stadium (cap 35,200), opened for the 1938 World Cup, has undergone a F52million refit for this summer's finals, with a new press box, executive lounge, video survelliance system and extra seating to replace terracing.

The city has had an uneasy relationship with football over the years (Parc Lescure was not used in the 1984 European Champs) but the game is back in favour with the locals after Bordeaux's run to the 1996 UEFA Cup Final.

Parc Lescure is best reached by bus – number 12 from the centre of town or number 9 from Saint-Jean station.

Ready for action...Parc Lescure

Lens Stade Felix-Bollaert

THE NORTHERN mining town of Lens has a population of just 35,000, yet its stadium, Stade Felix-Bollaert (cap 35,200) will host five group games (Saudi Arabia-Denmark, Jamaica-Croatia, Germany-Yugoslavia, Spain-Bulgaria, Colombia-England) and one second-round match.

The 65-year-old stadium, named after a local mine owner, has had a F100million facelift to prepare for this summer's finals. The Trannin, Delacourt and Lepagnot stands have been demolished and rebuilt., and new floodlights and public adress system installed.

The stadium is best reached by buses 4, 40 and 82 (stop at *Bibliotheque*) and 15, 32 and 33 (stop at *Bollaert*).

F100m refit...Stade Felix-Bollaert

Lyon Stade Gerland

LYON'S Stade Gerland will host five group matches (South Korea-Mexico, Romania-Colombia, USA-Iran, France-Denmark, Japan-Jamaica) and one quarter-final.

Around F90million has been spent redeveloping the stadium for the finals. Two stands have been rebuilt, and new floodlights, public adress and video surveillance systems installed. With a capacity of 44,000, Lyon will be the fourth largest stadium (after Saint-Denis, Paris and Marseille).

Stade Gerland, which was opened in 1924 after 10 years work and is now a listed building, is best reached by taking the metro line A (to Lyon Perrache station) or line B to Jean Mace station, and then a shuttle bus to the stadium.

Major rebuilding work...Stade Gerland

France 98

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